Friday May 23 1997

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The Guardian INTERNATIONAL

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Pages 6/7

Decca Aitkenhead

The demon target of Jack Straw's curfew

This section, page 13

Frantic scenes as lawyers race to contact woman after court ban

Abortion test case shambles

Erlend Clouston and Sarah Boseley

THE case of the Scottish woman seeking to terminate her pregnancy against her husband's will turned into an extraordinary legal and ethical drama yesterday.

As a second court forbade the abortion, a frantic hunt began to trace Lynn Kelly before the operation could be carried out.

Lawyers scattered as Scotland's Court of Session made the ruling, racing to contact Mrs Kelly's mother on her mobile phone and to fax the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary that doctors could be held in contempt of court if the abortion went ahead. Eventually, in the afternoon, it was revealed that Mrs Kelly had not had the operation.

The bizarre events, as court judgments swung one way and another while the woman at the centre of it all appeared to be prepared to exercise her professed right to choose without delay, served as a focus for the full heat of the ethical debate on the issue.

The National Abortion Campaign called the judges' ruling an outrage, while the Scottish Pro-Life Alliance said it was pleased that the child was being considered.

Yesterday morning, James Kelly, the husband, had applied to the court for the ban on the operation — which had been lifted on Wednesday in a ruling by Lord Eassie — to be temporarily reimposed pending a full appeal hearing. To the consternation of his supporters, Mrs Kelly's lawyer told the court the abortion had been scheduled for that morning. "The operation will now either have taken place or will be in the course of taking place," said Anne Smith, QC.

Copies of the court order were immediately faxed to the Royal Edinburgh Infirmary, where Mrs Kelly had been due to have the abortion before her husband obtained his first court ban last Friday. It was unclear last night whether Mrs Kelly's lawyers had reached her in time, or whether doctors had responded to legal pressure.

Mrs Kelly's apparent attempt to secure a fast-track abortion so soon after Lord Eassie's ruling was criticised by her husband's solicitor. "Lynn Kelly jumped the gun," said Wendy Sheehan.

In a furious reaction, Carol Kearney, of the National Abortion Campaign, said: "Women make complex and difficult decisions when considering abortion. This ruling demanding that Lynn Kelly rethinks her position on a decision she has already made is an insult to her and all women about their capacity to make competent decisions.

"If Mr Kelly wants a child he should seek to do this with somebody else and not impose a forced pregnancy on Mrs Kelly. This is clearly a breach of her right to self-determination, autonomy, and control over her body and life."

If Mrs Kelly had gone ahead and had the abortion, the campaign would have defended her against any legal consequences, she said.

But Doreen McLellan, of the Scottish Pro-Life Alliance, said: "We are pleased that the child is being considered, and hope that this will continue. It takes two people for a baby to be conceived and once this is so, three people are involved."

Members of the legal profession are watching the test case closely. Joe Thomson, Regius Professor of Law at Glasgow University, said: "I would be surprised if doctors had proceeded with the operation in the gap between the ruling and the appeal without legal advice. It is a large grey area."

Three judges will decide this morning whether Lord Eassie was correct to lift the ban forbidding Mrs Kelly, a 21-year-old cabaret singer, to terminate her pregnancy. Lord Eassie had briefly brought Scottish law into line with English acceptance that courts cannot frustrate operations approved under the terms of 1967 Abortion Act.

Mr and Mrs Kelly married 21 months ago in an Edinburgh registrar's office but separated in April. Both have accused the other of violent behaviour and of being unfit to look after their 18-month-old daughter Hazel.

James Kelly, a 28-year-old roofer, argued in the original interdict that his wife told lies about him to doctors who had to approve the abortion.

Lynn Kelly . . . accused of acting too hastily in her efforts to get a termination, said her husband's solicitor

Blair's 21 days

Only 21 days ago Tony Blair declared: "Today we are charged with the deep responsibility of government. Today, enough of talking; it is time to do."

Labour has since been doing it at a pace. There has been the substance of government: joining the Social Chapter; reform of the Bank of England; devolution bills; welfare to work proposals.

And changes to the style of government: "call me Tony" at Cabinet; Gordon 'lounge suits' Brown; the 30-minute PM's question time.

On pages 2 and 3 today the Guardian assesses this remarkable three weeks in British political history.

It's Labour for me, says billionaire press baron

Michael White and Andrew Culf

TONY Blair last night claimed a spectacular post-election propaganda coup when it emerged that Lord Rothermere, super-rich proprietor of the Daily Mail, Middle England's house organ, has decided to abandon the Conservative benches in the House of Lords in favour of Labour's.

Lord Rothermere, who is worth up to £1 billion on some estimates, will not actually take the Labour whip. Associated Newspapers made plain last night. In any case he is far from a regular attender in the Lords since he lives abroad for most of the year and is resident in Paris for tax purposes.

To further complicate the gesture, Labour plans to deprive Lord Rothermere, a 3rd Viscount, of the right to sit anywhere in the Lords as soon as it can find the parliamentary time and will-power to abolish hereditary voting rights.

Whether or not Lord Rothermere will be given a chance to vote Labour like ordinary Daily Mail readers when that happens is still unclear. News that new Labour had won over its first mega-rich tax exile startled Labour MPs at Westminster. "We know nothing about it," said officials in the government whips' office in the Lords. "Is it really true?" asked a Downing Street aide.

Lord Rothermere: 'Blair has got off to good start'

Daily Mail
ROY STRONG'S DIARIES: MORE SENSATIONAL REVELATIONS
There is a terrible danger that the British people, drugged by the seductive mantra 'it's time for a change', are stumbling, eyes glazed, into an election that could undo 1,000 years of our nation's history

The Mail's eve-of-poll front page warning

Lord Rothermere, who is 71, and the last of the legendary English press lords who fought with governments throughout the 20th century, let slip his decision at a dinner at the Savoy on Wednesday night.

Lord Rothermere's spokesman, Vivyan Harmsworth, a kinsman, last night suggested that the tycoon felt that the Government had "got off to a very good start" after John Major's ended on a less than glorious note.

His endorsement will produce turmoil at the Daily Mail, which on the eve of polling day the paper appeared emblazoned with the Union Flag and a ringing declaration warning against a vote for Labour.

The Daily Mail said Lord Rothermere's decision to sit on the Labour benches would not change the paper's editorial policy.

Portillo among candidates for Bosnia mediator post

Backing from Downing Street, but Spaniard is front runner

Ian Black in London and John Palmer in Brussels

MICHAEL Portillo, the former Conservative defence secretary, has been asked to take over international mediation in Bosnia from Sweden's Carl Bildt.

But despite backing from the Government, he is likely to be pipped at the post by a Spaniard.

Mr Portillo, who lost his Enfield seat in the general election, was asked by Mr Bildt, who is stepping down, if he wanted the job. There were no objections from Tony Blair or the Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook.

According to well-placed sources, Mr Portillo was supported by Labour until it became clear that the US and most European countries preferred Carlos Westendorp, a former Spanish foreign minister.

"We were aware that Mr Portillo was interested and we would have been very happy to see a British candidate," a Downing Street spokesperson said last night. Officials agreed that his Spanish rival now seemed set to win.

No decision is expected before next weekend's meeting of the Bosnian Peace Implementation Council, made up of the signatories of the Dayton peace agreement, which ended Bosnia's 43-month war.

These include the European Union, the United States, Russia, France, Britain and Japan, as well as Bosnia's Croats, Muslims and Serbs.

Mr Portillo may still have a slim chance because some EU governments would like to see Mr Westendorp appointed to the new post of EU Union foreign policy supremo.

The fact that another Spaniard, Javier Solana, is Nato secretary general may count against Mr Westendorp.

Earlier this year, Mr Bildt, a former Swedish prime minister, announced his intention to quit after two years in Bosnia and return to domestic politics. Since then there has been an increasingly frantic search for a successor.

Mr Portillo is regarded as an effective operator in Bosnia.

During his period as defence secretary, he was a strong advocate of Nato's decision to send troops to police the Dayton deal.

Mr Bildt wanted him as a political figure with clout, who could deliver.

Diplomats said Britain could not oppose Mr Portillo's candidacy if there was wide international support for him.

With such a large majority, Labour could afford in any event to be magnanimous towards a former Tory minister.

Yet being the international community's representative in Bosnia is one of the most thankless tasks in global diplomacy.

In recent months Mr Bildt has issued increasingly urgent warnings about the danger of renewed war. He has criticised the failure to secure the return of refugees to their homes in Bosnia as well as the continued failure of the international community to secure the arrest and transfer to the War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague of indicted war criminals — notably the Bosnia Serb leaders, Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic.

Prague Writers' Festival 1997

Texts for Nothing - Texty pro nic

The 7th Prague Writers' Festival presents a selection of fine authors from the Czech Republic and around the world. Meet them at the Franz Kafka Centre, Old Town Square, at 7pm from 24 to 28 June.

Tuesday 24 June	
E.L. Doctorow	USA
Martin Vopěnka	Czech Republic
Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill	Ireland
Viola Fischerová	Czech Republic
Wednesday 25 June	
André du Bouchet	France
Roland Jooris	Belgium
Vladimír Křivánek	Czech Republic
Giuseppe Conte	Italy
Thursday 26 June	
Aharon Appelfeld	Israel
Zinovy Zinik	Russia
Jana Štroblová	Czech Republic
Raoul Schrott	Austria
Friday 27 June	
Janice Galloway	Great Britain
Igor Pomerantsev	Russia
Elena Stefoi	Romania
Dimitris Nollas	Greece
Saturday 28 June	
Julian Barnes	Great Britain
Hanna Krall	Poland
Michael March	USA
António Franco Alexandre	Portugal

The Prague Writers' Festival is dedicated to Samuel Beckett.

For further details, please contact the Festival Director, Michael March, Revoluční 28, 110 00 Prague 1. Mobile: + 420 602 371 478

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Alan Travis

Alan Travis

21 days

Day 1
The Blairs spurn the prime ministerial Jaguar and take a triumphant stroll up Downing Street to the door of No 10. Blair creates new role for Deputy PM John Prescott, who is given overarching brief embracing the environment, transport and regional policy.
"A new dawn has broken and it's wonderful. This is a new era of politics in Britain. We are the people's party."
Tony Blair

Day 2
Blair completes Cabinet, which includes five women, a record. They are (from top left, clockwise) Margaret Beckett, Clare Short, Ann Taylor, Mo Mowlam and Harriet Harman.

Day 3
Robin Cook (below) announces the Government will sign the European Social Chapter in Juja. "It marks a fresh start in Europe for Britain, working with other members as a partner, not an opponent."

Day 4
Euan, Kathryn and Nicholas Blair move into No 11, the first young children to live at Downing Street since the war. Tony Banks appointed Minister for Sport.

Day 5
Gordon Brown (above) cuts interest rates by 0.25%, then announces that in future responsibility for setting rates will rest with the Bank of England.

Day 6
Sir David Simon (right), chairman of BP, appointed Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe.
The PM addresses the Parliamentary Labour Party, and warns against accepting "brown envelopes"
"We are not the masters. The people are the masters ..."
Tony Blair to the PLP.

Day 7
At the first Labour [illegible] (below) ministers [illegible] opera theatre [illegible] everyone, calls [illegible]
Later the PM [illegible] Downing Street to discuss [illegible] in Northern Ireland.
"I think he will be a very major change [illegible] in all issues as far as Ireland is concerned."
John Bruton on Blair.

Sprint start sets breathless

Tony Blair acknowledges the cheers as he takes office . . . three weeks on, where does he stand? PHOTOGRAPH: SEAN SMITH

Floodgates of change burst open after 18 backwater years

Michael White on Labour's fast-track timetable for regeneration and reform

WHEN Tony Blair abandoned his official car and walked into Downing Street three weeks ago today, voters who had combined to give him the largest electoral mandate for half a century got their first inkling that change was under way.

After 18 years of one-party rule, their scepticism was both deep-rooted and well-justified. Yet the most surprising thing about what has happened since that moment is that anyone should be surprised. Blair had promised to be both radical and reassuring. Here he was, shaking hands out on the street, seeking symbolically to do precisely that.

The pace set since Mr Blair returned from his audience with the Queen at Buckingham Palace has been relentless.

It is partly a continuance of the momentum built up in the election campaign. Labour's polished machine was in top gear, the Tory machine was (understandably) tired. New ministers were eager to try out their policies.

When the new prime minister was not setting the pace over Question Time procedures or the Northern Ireland peace process, then it was usually his deputy, John Prescott, firing off in all directions. Or his inexhaustible chancellor, Gordon Brown, reshaping the Bank of England. Or Brown's old rival, the Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, whose multi-media "mission statement" shook the gilded rafters of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Old lags in the Westminster-Whitehall village dimly remembered these sensations. Margaret Thatcher had entered office with a mission and a radical mandate in 1979, but moved more cautiously, a new premier uncertain of her strengths in a cabinet of (largely) hostile males.

In 1964, Harold Wilson had squeaked in with a Commons majority of four. Then, as now, the public mood was one of surprised relief as musty policy windows were thrown open for the first time in 13 years.

In 1964, as in 1997, senior civil servants responded with pleasure to the new regime's energy and drive. "The finest untrained mind I have met," one condescending mandarin said of Wilson's No.2, George Brown. He could have uttered similar words in 1997, though the economic legacy the Blair cabinet inherited is far more benign than the balance of payments crisis that shell-shocked Labour 33 years ago.

Just as Tony Blair looks to Bill Clinton's Washington for inspiration and warning so Harold Wilson aped the "First 100 Days" rhetoric of the blood-stained glamour of Kennedy presidency. Yet Wilson's government took one fateful early decision, not even to discuss devaluation of sterling (then at $2.80 to the £) until forced to in November 1967. It crippled the dash for sustainable growth in 1964-70, just as Chancellor Brown's Day 3 liberation of the arch-deflationist Bank of England could do again, if the Jeremiahs are right.

But ministers are less innocent in 1997, much as voters are. Even Labour governments, especially *New* Labour ones, have far less belief in the capacity of cabinet *diktat* to move mountains or to end poverty and despair. We are all post-modernists now and much of what the new administration has tried to do is to change mood and perception.

"Steering, not rowing," is how Clintonite students of government put it. Ministers are facilitators, not doers, who create the macro-economic conditions for growth and the micro-educational conditions for employment. In a globalised economy they no longer think they can create a domestic aluminium industry (a Wilsonian notion) by means of taxpayer subventions.

That does not leave them impotent. Governments can sign the EU social chapter, reinstate unions at GCHQ and import the European Convention on Human Rights. They *can* ban the manufacture and export of landmines and do so through the articulate utterances of a Cook or Clare Short, who sound as if they mean it.

Contrary to conventional wisdom before the election, Labour's manifesto pledges — the five explicit ones set out on John Prescott's pledge card, and those implicit on every page — are not modest at all. If Labour can revitalise health and education, put 250,000 young people back to work with the help of the windfall tax, curb crime and maintain steady economic growth, its achievement will be staggering. In 2001 or 2002 grateful voters will duly re-elect Mr Blair, in whatever voting system then prevails in a reformed constitutional settlement. If only life were that simple . . .

There will be troubles ahead — in the City, the boardroom and cabinet room, at the EU's Amsterdam summit and in circumstances impossible even for Peter Mandelson to conceive. The Tories will even get their act together again one day.

EDUCATION/ Cloak of anonymity to be cast aside

What have they done?

DAVID Blunkett set a cracking pace minutes after his appointment as Education Secretary, calling a press conference to instruct his officials to abandon the cloak of anonymity in a crusade for school improvement.

Within 24 hours they convinced him Labour's pledge to cut class sizes next year would come unstuck without emergency legislation to stop independent schools using the earmarked funds on another round of assisted places.

Mr Blunkett announced ambitious targets for a drastic improvement in 11-year-olds' command of the 3Rs. He overturned normal civil service procedures to appoint Michael Barber, an education professor, as head of a new unit for raising standards.

This week Mr Blunkett named 18 persistently failing schools. Yesterday he published a plan to scrap nursery vouchers and provide places for all four-year-olds. Work is also advanced on a far-reaching reform white paper for June.

Will it work?

The targets for 11-year-olds are a hostage to fortune, demanding a quantum leap in performance before the next election. The emergency bill will ensure money is available to start putting 440,000 five- to seven-year-olds into classes of 30 or less, but targeting it will be problematic. Naming failing schools struck the wrong tone for teachers.

John Carvel

WELFARE TO WORK/ Forces put into position for key offensive

What have they done?

WINNING the war against welfare dependency is one of the main objectives of the Blair administration, and the Government has been moving its forces into position ever since the election.

Frank Field was made number two at the Department for Social Security; the chief executive of Barclays, Martin Taylor, has been appointed to chair a tax and benefits system; and the former head of the Demos think tank, Geoff Mulgan, has been drafted into the No 10 policy unit with a specific welfare-to-work remit.

The offensive will begin on June 10, with Labour's Budget, billed as the most radical reform of the welfare state in 50 years.

Britain's welfare state bill will be almost £100 billion this year. Labour wants to reintroduce the work ethic to the long-term jobless.

Step one will be the windfall tax — a levy on the excess profits of the privatised utilities.

The money raised will provide job subsidies to employers willing to take on people under 25 who have been out of work for more than six months, or to provide training, education, or places on an environmental task force. Those who refuse any of the options may see their benefits cut.

Will it work?

Labour's mixture of incentives and sanctions will help to stem the flow of people into long-term welfare dependency, because those recently unemployed are attractive to employers. But employers will be wary of potential employees who have been on the dole for a year or more, however big the subsidy might be.

Sanctions are also less likely to work on those living in the penumbra between work and the black economy.

Larry Elliott

YOUTH JUSTICE/ Fast-track punishment for teenage tearaways

What have they done?

THE Crime and Disorder Bill to be introduced this autumn will halve the time it takes to get persistent young offenders into court, end repeat police cautioning and introduce curfews on the under-10s and parental responsibility orders.

In advance of the legislation, a 12-strong specialist task force, including representatives of the police, social services and Audit Commission, is being set up to advise the Home Secretary on future policy and draft the new legislation.

This is to be supplemented by a National Youth Justice Board. Guidance is being issued to magistrates to encourage those involved with teenage tearaways to deal with cases more speedily. Local youth offender teams will be established to plan and supervise diversion programmes and community sentences.

Will it work?

Jack Straw says a fast-track system of punishment for persistent young offenders will force them to face up to the consequences of their crimes and save police time spent arresting and rearresting them.

It is no good waiting an average of four-and-a-half months to get a youngster into court. The new system will lessen the risk of youngsters repeat offending while on bail or of spending long periods locked up on remand.

Critics warn that replacing repeat cautions with a "single final warning" is too rigid and will eliminate much of the successful "cautioning plus" work which goes on in many police forces alongside a second caution to divert selected youngsters from crime.

They also warn that a blanket curfew on the under-10s is too sweeping, applying not only to those in moral danger but also to groups of nine-year-olds playing football in the street on summer evenings.

— Alan Travis

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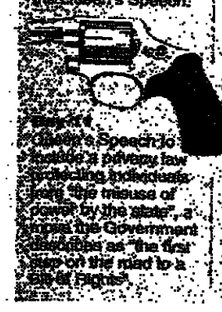
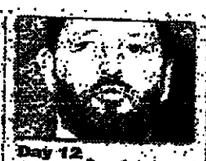
هكذا من الأصل

The Labour Party has changed. People who are coming into parliament for the first time are New Labour people – modernising people – who are fully committed to the direction in which Tony Blair is taking the Labour Party.
Peter Mandelson (left) May 11

Day 10
Government announces that 13-year ban on unions at GCHQ is to be lifted, while a total ban on picketing will be in the Queen's Speech.



Day 11
Queen's Speech to include a privacy law protecting individuals from "the misuse of power by the state", a move the Government describes as "the first step on the road to a bill of rights".

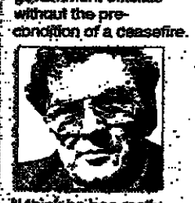


Day 12
Education Minister David Blunkett (above) announces his aim to improve the basics of primary education, the three R's, in order that 30 per cent more children meet expected standards. "We are taking a risk. We shall be judged by how we meet these targets."

Day 13
The Queen's Speech: Her Majesty announces far-reaching constitutional bills, and a commitment to a minimum wage. "We will not put right the damage of 18 years in 18 days or even 18 months. But in 12 days we have already shown we can make a difference." Tony Blair.

Day 14
Home Secretary Jack Straw announces he is to halt the jailing of fine defaulters, which accounts for the imprisonment of up to 1,300 women a year.

Day 15
Blair visits Northern Ireland, and offers Sinn Fein a meeting with government officials without the pre-condition of a ceasefire.



"I think he has really opened the door to creating the circumstances where we can take the gun forever out of Irish politics." John Hume (above).

Day 16
The ultimate compliment: news leaks of a blueprint for renewal of the Conservative Party being based on Blair's shake-up of old Labour.

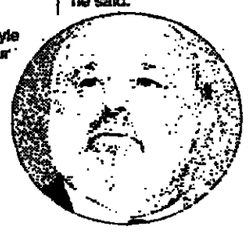
Day 17
Labour sends a clear message on sleaze as Mohammed Sarwar (below), MP for Glasgow Govan, is accused of bribery in his election campaign: "Either he is innocent or he is not. In which case he is no longer a member of the Labour Party or a member of Parliament," says a Labour source.

Day 18
Frank Dobson announces an end to tobacco firms' sponsorship of sporting events, and John Prescott (above,) sets a 10-point plan for the water companies to cut leaks.

Day 19
Dressed in a lounge suit, the Chancellor tells a dinner-jacketed Mansion House audience that responsibility for City regulation is to pass from Threadneedle Street to an independent body.

Day 20
First of the new style PMQs sees Labour all smiles. A complete ban on landmines is announced. The devices are responsible for 20,000 deaths or maimings every year.

Day 21
Health Secretary Frank Dobson (below) announces plans to save £100 million by cutting NHS red tape and bureaucracy: "Taxpayers' money must be used to treat patients, not to sustain forests of paperwork" he said.



pace for marathon session

OUTSIDERS/ Top company catches boost business credibility

What they have done?

THE Government has launched an unprecedented recruitment drive in the private sector to fill key reforming posts in the new administration. The most important jobs have gone to business leaders who were not open Labour supporters before the election.

The first big catch was Sir David Simon, lured away from the chairmanship of BP to become Minister for Trade and Competiveness in Europe.

Then Martin Taylor was persuaded to mix his job as chief executive of Barclays with a two-days-a-month commitment to head a Whitehall task force on shaking up the employment benefits system.

Ministers have also been anxious to net Peter Jarvis, the outgoing chief executive of drinks group Whitbread, to be head of the Low Wage Commission, which will help to set the level of the minimum wage.

Mr Jarvis earned more than £1 million in pay and perks last year and is staunchly opposed to the minimum wage.

Will it work?

There is a clear intention to make radical changes in the business of government. Bringing in private sector people with drive is a sure way to shake up Whitehall without relying only on endless redefinitions of departments and their briefs. The drive helps create an image of experience and one-nation consensus. But the recruitment of business leaders — especially those not known for their pro-Labour leanings — primarily helps to convince the business community that Labour is on its side even when the agenda includes anti-business items like the minimum wage and the social chapter.

Business people brought into government usually have a torrid time. Boardroom skills do not easily translate into political ones.

The multi-lingual, pro-European Sir David Simon is well respected in Brussels and could play a key role in mending Britain's damaged relations with the rest of the EU. His presence should also help to limit any flak from industry on the minimum wage and the social chapter.

But Sir David could find that his fervently pro-single currency beliefs leave him exposed if Labour gets fractious on European monetary union.

Martin Taylor is no expert on welfare but he has a sharp mind and should help to encourage the private sector to play a part in benefit reforms and getting people back to work.

The appointment Peter Jarvis looks most risky. He could be used as the tough person in a bloody fight with unfriendly unions and ratchet down the wage to around £3.20 an hour, which is acceptable to business. On the other hand, the Government might be thinking that a man who earned the equivalent of £521.38 an hour last year will be coy about arguing for a ridiculously low wage.

Either way, brickbats will be the order of the day.

Simon Beavis

BANK OF ENGLAND/ Balance between giving and taking away

What they have done

LABOUR has announced two significant reforms of the Bank of England in the past three weeks.

First, the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, has ceded control over the setting of interest rates to a new nine-strong monetary policy committee at the Bank.

Mr Brown will set an inflation target, appoint four of the members of the committee, then leave the Bank to decide on where interest rate should be.

But while giving extra responsibility to the Bank with one hand, Mr Brown has also diminished the power of the Old Lady with the other, by stripping it of its banking supervision role. A beefed-up Securities and Investment Board will now be charged with protecting investors.

On interest rates, Mr Brown believes that Britain needs economic stability which will provide the right conditions for growth and jobs.

He argues that depoliticising interest rate policy will help avoid future boom-bust cycles.

On supervision, Labour says that the mixture of monitoring by the Bank and self-regulation established by the Conservatives in the 1980s has been an abject failure, and maintains that a new super-regulator that straddles the entire financial services sector is needed to cope with all-purpose global companies.

Will it work?

Too early to say on both fronts.

If the financial markets believe that the Bank will be better at setting interest rates than the Government was, then the enhanced credibility could lead to lower borrowing costs.

The main risk — apart from any worries that there might be about the issue of democratic control — is that the Bank's hawkish view on inflation could lead to deflationary policies.

On regulation, the concern is that the SIB will be too big, too disruptive and too unwieldy.

Larry Elliott

DEVOLUTION/ Speed is of the essence

What have they done?

TONY Blair knows that speed is important if he is to complete the devolution programme. The Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill, given its second reading yesterday, paves the way for a test of public opinion in Scotland in September on the planned Scottish Parliament and in Wales on its Assembly.

If the referendum votes are positive, bills to set up the devolved bodies will begin their passage this autumn, with royal assent scheduled for next summer.

Will it work?

Polls in Wales show less than 50 per cent in favour of Assembly, giving the Welsh Office team a lot of hard campaigning to do. Polls in Scotland show overwhelming support for Scottish Parliament but the second question, on tax-raising power, is expected to receive a less enthusiastic response. Other problems will include calls for a reduction in both number of Scottish MPs and expenditure in Scotland.

Ewen MacAskill

IRELAND/ Battle for hearts and minds

What have they done?

UNIONISTS were assured that the Government will not be a persuader for Irish unity and that it had ruled out British withdrawal until at least the middle of the next century. Sinn Fein were invited to talks with officials in "one further effort" to restore IRA ceasefire and all-party negotiations, giving the stalled peace process a kick-start. Mo Mowlam is already winning ordinary Ulster hearts and minds by going out and speaking with both sides over, for instance, the parades issue.

Will it work?

Strong majority gives Tony Blair a promising breadth of scope to impose decisions not enjoyed by John Major, who did much of the groundwork for the present shape of a peace settlement. Many believe that strong political direction and will were missing. But Mr Blair could yet be faced by a resurgence of paramilitary violence if the IRA does not swiftly restore its ceasefire.

David Sharrock

HEALTH/ Vital surgery on paperwork

What have they done?

MINISTERS have demanded an extra £34 million savings in management costs this year and ordered officials to find ways of cutting the paperwork of the NHS internal market. An additional £100 million is to go into patient care.

For the longer term, ministers have announced pilot-testing of various new forms of commissioning health care. Further extension of GP fundholding has been frozen for 12 months and changes are being made to the scheme to make it more equitable.

Will it work?

The NHS is unlikely to see much difference on the basis of what has emerged so far. The £100 million for patient care is barely one day's funding.

The changes to fundholding may deal with the most controversial aspects of the scheme. But it is likely to be years before the choice of a preferred commissioning model which would lead to substantial change.

David Brindle

SPORTS SPONSORS/ Up in smoke

What have they done?

A BAN on £8 million a year sponsorship of sports events by the tobacco industry was announced as part of a wider drive to reduce smoking. Sports are to be given time to find other sponsors, existing contracts to be allowed to expire. Legislation is to be introduced in the autumn.

Will it work?

Sports which rely on variety of sponsors, including motor racing, cricket and golf, gave measured response but darts and snooker, which crucially depend on cigarette advertising, said it would prove a body blow. But the ban is more likely to affect non-televised sports such as angling and showjumping.

The tobacco industry claims that advertising does not promote overall sales but is only designed to increase market share of individual brands. But Health Secretary Frank Dobson dismisses this argument as ludicrous. The British Medical Association and Royal College of Nursing were delighted.

Alan Travis

EUROPE/ Fear that substance may not match change of style

What have they done?

FOREIGN Secretary Robin Cook has signalled a more friendly approach to the European Union and promised to put human rights at the centre of Britain's international strategy.

Britain is to sign up to the Maastricht Social Chapter on workers' rights; agreed to increase majority voting on environment, agriculture and other "soft" issues; hinted at agreement to new treaty at next month's Amsterdam summit; rejoined Unesco; banned use of landmines.

Separate department for international development was set up under Clare Short, suggesting greater commitment to help the world's poorest.

Will it work?

The EU wants an even more friendly Britain, but there are strict limits. Labour insists on retaining national border controls and Nato as basis for defence. A deal is also urgently needed to end fish quota-hopping. Questions are looming over whether Labour's new tone will be matched by much change of substance, and worry that not joining first wave of Emu will leave Britain out of emerging EU hard core. Ending arms sales to dodgy regimes is hard to square with support for Britain's huge defence industry. Annual Foreign Office report on human rights could sour relations with lucrative trade partners like Saudi Arabia. Nigerian human rights abuses a time bomb waiting to explode at October's Commonwealth summit.

Ian Black

Gordon Brown . . . Since he became Chancellor, his approach to the Bank has been two-edged PHOTOGRAPH: MARTIN GODWIN

LOTTERY/ Cash commitment to health and school projects

What have they done?

A TOTAL £1 billion of Lottery money over the next five years will be used on innovative health and education projects. The Lottery is to be operated on a non-profit-making basis when the contract with Camelot ends in 2001.

A bill this autumn will alter the way that funds are distributed to the regions to ensure they get a fairer share.

Will it work?

Ministers say the Lottery has proved extremely effective at raising money but believe that more of the proceeds should go to things they see as important to their lives, rather than projects such as spending £13 million on the Churchill papers. Labour is also tapping into "anger that a private monopoly makes more than £1 million a week profit from the Lottery."

Opponents say Labour's plan would jeopardise the Lottery's success. Camelot says that a not-for-profit operator would raise less money for the good causes. Teachers and health unions are anxious that Lottery cash should not replace public funding for basic needs in schools and hospitals.

Alan Travis

HANDGUNS/ Honouring the pledge to Dunblane parents

What have they done?

IT has already been announced that MPs are to be given a free vote on whether all handguns should be banned. A short bill will redeem Tony Blair's promise to the parents of the children massacred at Dunblane primary school, Scotland, to tackle the burgeoning "gun culture".

A complete ban would outlaw the private ownership of 40,000 guns not covered by last year's firearms legislation prohibiting the ownership of the 160,000 guns with a calibre greater than .22. Illegal guns will have to be handed into the police by a date to be set this year.

Will it work?

It is expected that MPs will vote for the complete ban. A Gun Control Network survey of Labour candidates in the election showed 97 per cent backing.

However, it is likely to lead to a turbulent battle in the House of Lords over compensation, which is expected to cost at least £12 million.

Supporters say prohibition will strike a body blow at Britain's growing gun culture. Shooters say a total ban will drive several Olympic sports underground.

Alan Travis

'I loved him. We both had the same virus. Maybe I was naive, but it made sense to stay together'

—Janette Pink

Janette Pink, left, and fisherman Pavlos Georgiou with his lawyer outside the court in Larnaca yesterday PHOTOGRAPHS: PHILIP MARK

Aids woman tells court of fateful romance

HIV-positive lover on trial in Cyprus

Mike Kelly in Larnaca and Owen Bowcott

A DYING Englishwoman who claims her former boyfriend knowingly infected her with the Aids virus yesterday gave evidence against him in a Cypriot courtroom.

Janette Pink, aged 45, looking pale and gaunt from the ravages of the disease, delivered her testimony in the hope that it will lead to the jailing of Pavlos Georgiou, a fisherman, aged 40.

Mrs Pink, a divorcee and mother of two, from Basildon, in Essex, was forced to wait five hours at the begining of the hearing in Larnaca district court.

Georgiou, who is HIV positive, did not appear initially. His lawyer, Tassos Economou, told the court he was suffering from a gastro-intestinal complaint, and was too ill to attend. He produced a medical certificate to back his argument.

After hearing submissions from both sides Judge Antonis Liatsos summoned Georgiou to the court with an arrest warrant.

Georgiou sat in the dock less than 10 feet away from Mrs Pink, listening with head bowed as she gave two hours of testimony.

She described how she met and fell in love with Georgiou in 1994 when she stayed at the family's holiday home in the Mediterranean island.

She had separated from her husband, a City accountant, and Georgiou, she said, told her his wife, Martha, was dying of leukaemia.

Asked if the couple used condoms when they made love, Mrs Pink told the court: "We were both adults. We weren't teenagers. It didn't even occur to me to use a condom as we were both in long-standing relationships."

Early in their romance, she was told of a report in a Cypriot paper which said that Georgiou's wife had Aids and had passed it on to their newborn child.

When she confronted Georgiou, he denied the story. Mrs Pink then had an Aids test, which proved negative, so she decided to believe him.

But in the summer of 1994 Mrs Georgiou died and one of her children told Mrs Pink she had succumbed to Aids. A medical test a few weeks later revealed that Mrs Pink had become HIV positive.

When she disclosed to the analysts who tested her that she had a boyfriend from the holiday resort of Aya Napa, one said: "Don't tell me, it's Pavlos."

The relationship continued. Mrs Pink explained: "I loved him. We both had the same virus. Maybe I was naive, but it just made sense for us to stay together."

She moved in with Georgiou and looked after him and his four children. In 1996 she became pregnant by him but had an abortion when tests revealed the unborn child was HIV positive.

In July last year the relationship soured. Mrs Pink returned to Britain and was almost immediately admitted to hospital with pneumonia.

She left hospital two months later determined to take action against Georgiou. "As I got sicker, the knowledge of what Pavlos had done to me actually sank in and I thought something should be done about it."

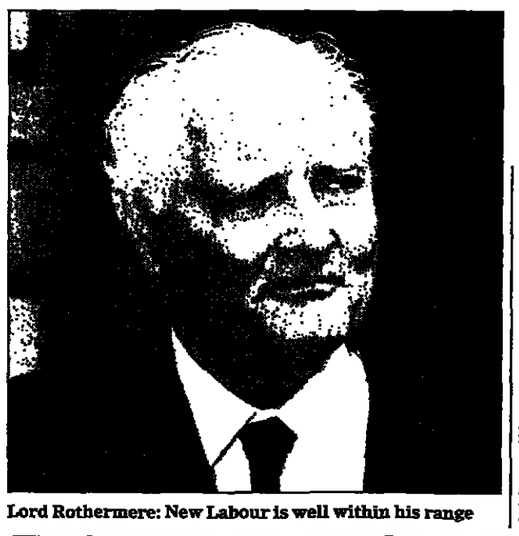
With the help of her family and friends, she launched a legal battle and eventually the Attorney General of Cyprus, Alecos Markides, decided to prosecute.

Georgiou is accused that through negligence he committed an act that could possibly transmit the infection of a disease dangerous to life.

The offence was introduced in Cyprus in the 1950s, in an attempt to combat the spread of typhoid and cholera on the island. If convicted, Georgiou faces a maximum two years in jail and a £2,000 fine.

The hearing was adjourned until today when Mrs Pink faces cross-examination by the defence.

Rightwing press baron to support Labour in the Lords



Lord Rothermere: New Labour is well within his range

Michael White on a change of tack for owner of Daily Mail

LABOUR MPs and peers reacted with astonishment yesterday when news filtered across London to Westminster that Lord Rothermere, proprietor of the Daily Mail, had told colleagues that he planned to sit on the Labour benches.

Perhaps they would have been less surprised if they had studied the 3rd Viscount's track record a little closer rather than remembering that his grandfather had flirted with Mussolini and been offered the crown of Hungary in the 1930s — or that Lord Rothermere himself has been consistently nice about Tony Blair.

Almost as much to the point, he has always been a maverick. Within those immaculately tailored suits lies a 71-year-old amateur poet, student of Zen Buddism and the paranormal.

New Labour is well within his range, and for the past three years the press lord and his senior executive, editor-in-chief Sir David English, have been ardently courting Blair, Gordon Brown and other rising stars.

It was a famous diary column in the Spectator in October 1995 which alerted the wider public to a courtship which dates from the Kinnock era when, Sir David mischievously reported, young Tony Blair was virtually the only shadow minister willing to break bread with the hated Mail, the Thatcherite voice of Middle England.

At that time English wondered aloud, on Lord Rothermere's behalf, if the Mail could support Labour when the election came. In the event it didn't, though the London Evening Standard — which he also owns — did.

Supposedly a dunce at Eton, Lord Rothermere is worth up to £1 billion. But he did not turn round his ailing newspaper inheritance in the 1970s, turning the once mighty Express group into Fleet Street's mid-market basket case instead, without famously trusting his editors. Like a medieval monarch he picks his barons and then backs them.

After English gave up the Mail that meant trusting Paul Dacre, whose instincts are more puritanical and Eurosceptic than theirs, but retains their trust.

"Sometimes I think he would like to tow England out into the middle of the Atlantic. I am not sure that is what I want to do," Lord Rothermere told the FT last month.

Less censorious than his flagship paper, Lord Rothermere has good reason to be. He lives in France as a tax exile and travels extensively with his second wife, Maiko, whom he finally married after his first wife, Lady Rothermere, an ex-starlet universally known as "Bubbles", died in 1992 after a tempestuous, but deeply felt, 35-year marriage.

The nephew of Lord Northcliffe, the greatest of the Fleet Street tycoons, Rothermere, whose son Jonathan is being groomed to succeed him, is the last of the English press barons in a globalised media market that is dominated by Rupert Murdoch on four continents.

He was known to be thoroughly disgruntled with John Major ("a nice man, but not a leader") and there may be an element of business calculation in yesterday's gesture.

Blair ready to set his terms for European co-operation

Ian Black and Michael White

TONY Blair will today use his first foray into the European Union since becoming Prime Minister to warn fellow leaders that border controls remain sacrosanct for Britain. But he will assure them he wants "dialogue not war".

When Mr Blair meets his new colleagues at Noordwijk in Holland he will renew pre-election promises to make a constructive contribution to shaping the EU's future, albeit "on British terms" as the EU 15 search for what Labour sees as a "People's Europe."

No decisions are expected from the specially-convened summit. But the 15 leaders plan to sound each other out ahead of next month's Amsterdam summit which they are keen to see produce a successful conclusion to the intergovernmental conference (IGC) on EU reform.

Downing Street signalled last night that Britain would end the "impotence and defeatism of the last few years".

Mr Blair will be pressed on his plans as final bargaining begins on a new EU treaty, updating Maastricht. His bottom lines are getting his way on borders, defence, and fish quota-hopping.

"Clarity and strength, dialogue not war, solutions not confrontation," are promised by Whitehall. But there was substance in the change, not just a new tone from Mr Blair. "He will be established as a leading player on the European stage and that will be to Britain's advantage"

He would be holding out for "clear legal authority" over border controls and preparing for detailed negotiations on how Britain is to co-operate over crime, drugs and terrorism.

Camp dwellers show bravery and bravado

Forest trek uncovers depth of defiance

John Vidal evades a ring of besiegers

PETE the window cleaner, Lee and Jack the Dog lead us through the woods. We easily dodge two guards smoking on the ridge; we duck below the sight line of others and creep and slip through the rosebay willow and wild garlic. We're in for a bollocking and a very long walk home if caught.

In 45 minutes, after one river crossing by fallen log, we reach the razor-sharp perimeter fence. It's 8ft high four miles long and surrounds and divides the 100 or so protesters holed up in tunnels or trees in five camps.

Last night the security guards extended it down to the River Bollin. The fields, too, are now full of guards. Every day the noose tightens.

The camps are now split by the fence, though most are connected to each other by precarious aerial ropeway. Some are running low in food and alcohol. Most have personal eviction stashes but these are reserved for when the bailiffs arrive. In the meantime, each camp needs provisions.

I am carrying fresh fruit, veg and Chilean wine to share with the Cake Hole tunnellers at Flywood camp. Having left the protest site by the main gates without problem, the only way back in that does not involve criminal damage is by tree or river. The Times reporter takes to the branches, the Guardian to the water.

Paul is coming in with me. He is the head of a Derbyshire development charity and wants to see his daughter, Erin, who he has barely seen in 10 years.

We strip down and, under the eyes of the guards behind the fence we plunge into the chest-high deep river. Immediately we regret it. Just upstream is one of Britain's leading chemical works.

Our 300 yard long river walk is accompanied on both sides by jeering guards. Twice we stumble. Finally, soaked from head to toe we reach River Rats camp where there's tea, a fire, and Erin to welcome her father with news that she has glandular fever. "It means I can't snog dad," she says.

The protesters say the siege tactics aren't working. As many new people are entering the camps as are being arrested and bailed off. Supplies are being chucked over the fence at night by local supporters. "They can't patrol the whole fence," says one man at Flywood camp. "Anyway, we can always dig under it if necessary." Nevertheless the siege is tightening and at night there is great activity in the undergrowth. Even as the "Pixies" protesters are crawling around to cut holes in the fence, so police are creeping into the camps with night sights to check on numbers and defences.

Camp guards report mysterious luminous markings appearing on the trees. "We're all on full alert now."

A protester sits at the entrance to his tunnel at Sir Cliff Richard OBE Vegan Revolution camp awaiting the arrival of bailiffs PHOTOGRAPH: ANDREW TESTA

Officials warn protesters of tunnel danger

David Ward

THE official leading the eviction of protesters from the site of Manchester Airport's second runway warned yesterday that a tunnel at the Zion Tree camp could turn into a death trap.

"The so-called eviction could become a rescue," said Randal Hibbert, under-sheriff of Cheshire. "We are seriously worried about the tunnel. And this is not kidology."

Three protesters — Wendy, Normal, and Irish Alan — dived into the tunnel below an 80ft beech tree when Mr Hibbert and his bailiffs raided the camp at first light on Tuesday. They are thought to be about 30ft down and to have ample food supplies.

More than an inch of rain fell during a storm on Tuesday night and there are fears that water could be seeping into the thick clay that forms the banks of the River Bollin. The protesters claim most of the water in the tunnel will have entered through the entrance after professional tunnellers — the "men in black" — battered down its door.

"[The tunnel] is very unstable and if it collapses no one will get out," Mr Hibbert said. "The tunnellers are in a dangerous situation. They have been told to leave."

But his warnings were dismissed by Jeff Gazzard, the protesters' spokesman. "This is a ruse," he said. "We are trying to maintain a fine line between the safety of our friends and the hysterical, bullying threats of Mr Hibbert. He needs to get a life and we hope it's not the life of one of our colleagues."

From their lair, the tunnellers issued a demand for aviation fuel to be taxed. "This would end the anomaly where car petrol is taxed while plane fuel is not," said Normal. "It is unacceptable that aviation should be subsidised."

Cheshire police became involved in the eviction for the first time yesterday when Mr Hibbert and his bailiffs prepared to move on the isolated Wild Garlic camp. So far work has been restricted to the part of the protest site patrolled by Greater Manchester Police.

Four protesters are believed to be in underground chambers at Wild Garlic: two women are in a hole called Hilda, two men in Hobbit Hole. There are five tree houses on the camp, which has now been cut off from the other five.

Terry Waite, the former Beirut hostage, will lead a protest procession to the runway site today. He said fundamental principles were at stake and that the planning process had been loaded in favour of the airport.

هكذا من الأصل

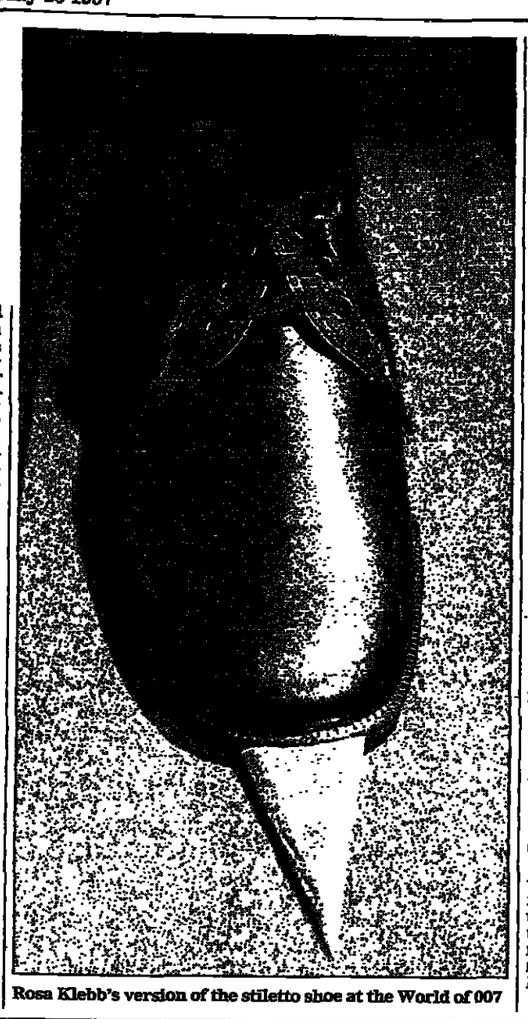
Licence to thrill at 007 World

THE Master of the Royal Armouries pulled a Walther PPK from his shoulder-holster yesterday and loosed a series of rounds at "snooty critics of his latest exhibition", *writes Martin Wainwright.*

Brandishing the small black pistol — made famous by James Bond — Guy Watson said of the Armouries' huge display on 007, which opens in Leeds today: "In 200 years, there's no question that anyone writing about popular culture in our century would have to examine James Bond."

Although criticised by some historians and rival museums, the World of 007, which runs until the end of August, is expected to attract record crowds since the Armouries' moved to the £43 million Leeds museum from the Tower of London a year ago.

The exhibition was opened by actor Desmond Llewellyn, who created Bond's laser watches, exploding cigarettes and other a host of other gadgets in his film role as Q, armourer for MI6. Also on show are Rosa Klebb's poison-bladed shoes and a toy version of Blofeld's torture table — powered by a rubber band.



Rosa Klebb's version of the stiletto shoe at the World of 007

Government will honour campaign pledge with £10m for breast cancer services

NHS managers' jobs targeted to provide cash for patient care

David Brindle, Social Services Correspondent

HOSPITALS and community health trusts with high management costs will be the targets of an extra £34 million cuts announced yesterday by the Government.

The money will go towards Labour's goal of an additional £100 million for patient care this year. Fulfilling an election campaign promise, ministers said £10 million of this would go to improve breast cancer services for women.

Frank Dobson, Health Secretary, said: "I expect to see early and tangible improvements in breast cancer services and I expect women to have speedy access to high quality care."

Ministers announced that the total £100 million extra for care would come from £20 million to be saved by deferring for a year the entry of up to 1,000 family doctors to the GP fundholding scheme, plus £80 million from management costs — £46 million of which was already planned by the last government.

Plans to find the management savings will be agreed with NHS trusts and health authorities throughout England, Wales and Scotland by the end of June. Mr Dobson said attention would be "focused on trusts which have particularly high management costs".

According to the authoritative Fitzhugh Directory of NHS Trusts, there is wide variation in their management and administrative costs — the so-called M2 measure being used in this exercise. The Guy's and St Thomas's hospitals trust in south London has the highest M2 costs at £14.6 million.

Frank Dobson: will hit high management cost trusts

The £80 million savings, if found entirely from job cuts, could mean more than 3,000 redundancies. Mr Dobson said: "It may be that some staff will lose their jobs, but it is also likely that it will be done, at least in part, through jobs not being filled."

The Institute of Health Services Management criticised the "knee-jerk targeting" of managers and called for a proper debate on their effectiveness. Peter Homa, its vice-chairman, said: "It is easy to score political points by making managers scapegoats, but a service which spends £100 million a day needs effective management."

Doctors' leaders also voiced scepticism. Sandy Macara, chairman of the British Medical Association, said: "We have to recognise the NHS is facing an inherited financial crisis, with deficits of more than £750 million. The scale of this problem cannot be addressed adequately simply by re-routing funds at the margin."

On the breast cancer initiative, which Labour leader Tony Blair and his wife, Cherie, highlighted yesterday by visiting King's College hospital, south London, the BMA said it was "not generally helpful" to focus on one clinical condition at the expense of others equally pressing.

The King's Fund health policy think tank agreed that £10 million for breast cancer was "not necessarily the best use of extra funds for cancer services".

However, the Cancer Research Campaign, said: "We, too, think it outrageous that women of Britain — unlike many of their European sisters — have to wait for the right treatment."

Record of nearly 1.2m on hospital waiting list at end of Tories' final year

THE last hospital waiting lists under the Conservatives set a record of almost 1.2 million people queuing for treatment, with a rise of more than 40 per cent in three months in numbers waiting more than a year, *writes David Brindle.*

Provisional lists for the end of March, published yesterday, show that 1,164,400 people were awaiting hospital admission in England, against just over 1 million a year before, and 918,000 at the time of the 1992 general election. The total was up almost 60,000, or 5.4 per cent, on that for the end of December last year, representing an annual rate of increase of more than 20 per cent.

Numbers waiting more than a year had risen 9,200 in three months to 31,300. Of these, 155 had been waiting more than 18 months in breach of the Patient's Charter guarantee. In March last year, only 4,600 people had been queuing longer than a year as the last government came close to eradicating such delays. The picture started to deteriorate as the NHS suffered a funding squeeze and spiralling emergency hospital admissions.

Baroness Jay of Paddington, Health Minister, said the latest figures were "a legacy of neglect" and the Government had no magic wand to improve them.

Simon Hughes, Liberal Democrat health spokesman, said waiting lists would only get longer if no more cash was found for the NHS.

Hilarious, horrible and plain bonkers

Review

Adrian Searle

Blimey!
21
Matthew Collings

BLIMEY! is the first imprint of 21, a new book publishing venture masterminded by Karen Wright, editor of the art magazine Modern Painters, arty popster David Bowie, former Tory MP for Hove Tim Sainsbury, and high-minded art dealer Bernard Jacobson. What a weird coven they make.

And what a strange book their first offering is. Blimey! is bonkers. The title, a rejoinder to exhibitions of new art which come packaged with modishly upbeat soubriquets like "Sensation" and "Brilliant!" signals Matthew Collings's mock-incredulity at the state of contemporary art. Subtitled "From Bohemia to Britpop: The London Artworld from Francis Bacon to Damien Hirst", the book is a driven man's journey from the 1950s to Britpop. Along the way, the two collide: "I saw Leigh Bowery on stage singing Eleanor Rigby once . . . Lucian Freud was there at the bar drinking with Sarah Lucas. That seemed right . . . Francis Bacon would certainly be going round with Damien Hirst and the guitarist from Blur now, if Francis Bacon wasn't dead, and if Blur weren't out."

Collings assumes the guise of a hip, postmodern Beat anthropologist, as he takes us from his life in children's homes to the incredulous world-weary critic, hyperventilating his way from cafes to studios, from a dinner where American sculptor Richard Serra threatens to bottle him to the Prado in Madrid, where Collings experiences a mini-epiphany amongst the Goyas and Velasquez court dwarves. But it is the social minefield of the art opening which provides Collings with his true habitat: "Outside you appear normal and go around saying Hi! brightly, or Hmm, that's interesting. But inside you are reeling . . . Regular private view goers all have disintegrated personalities and are suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome." To which, of course, the author is not immune, as he careers about, making his gaffes and strutting his stuff. And like everyone in the art world, he bitches and raves and gossips. Blimey! is written in an exhausting, at times hilarious series of stream-of-consciousness vignettes, portraits and caricatures.

Illustrated with artworks and photographs of artists, dealers and critics at work and play by off-duty TV producer Ian Macmillan, Blimey! is an indispensible snoop round the art world, capturing a world in love with itself. The art, too, is often cast in electrifying, original terms. Leon Kossoff, for example, paints "figures all looming and staring . . . and the brown and grey paint all splattering and bulging and the colour all drained out, so there's no chance of feeling happy." Like the rest of us, Collings wants something from art, but he doesn't know what.

At his best, Collings is an original and perceptive commentator. At worst, he's lazy, spiteful and meretricious. Hilarious and horrible, intelligent and frightening, Blimey! is the book the art world deserves.

Tree substance could revolutionise treatment

Chemical offers hope on cancer

Chris Mihill, Medical Correspondent

A SUBSTANCE derived from the bark of an African willow tree could revolutionise cancer treatment by opening a new way to kill tumours, researchers said yesterday.

The scientist said the chemical had a dramatic ability to shut down blood vessels supplying oxygen and nutrients to the tumours, meaning the cancers starved.

The research highlighted a "back to nature" approach to finding cures for cancer, with a renewed emphasis on screening plants, herbs and marine organisms for natural anti-cancer agents.

Such searches involved renewed interest in ancient folk cures and herbal medicine, and underlined the dangers of destroying the natural world, because undiscovered medicines were being lost.

Dai Chaplin and colleagues, from the Cancer Research Campaign's Gray Laboratories, at Mount Vernon hospital, in Northwood, west London, have been investigating a substance called Combretastatin A4. This can be manmade, but was originally derived from the bark of the African Bush Willow (*Combretum Caffrum*).

Dr Chaplin told a CRC press conference in London that against some types of tumour a single dose of Combretastatin could kill 95 per cent of the cancer cells within a few hours by starving them of their blood supply. He said that each tumour contained hundreds of thousands of cells, which made it extremely difficult to eradicate all of them by targeting tumours directly. But interfering with just a few cells in the blood vessels could cause these to wither, denying the tumour nutrients.

Dr Chaplin said Combretastatin appeared to affect only tumour blood vessels, and leave healthy veins and arteries untouched. Tumour blood vessels were fast growing, possibly producing a different type of growth factor, and it might be this that Combretastatin was affecting.

Although the drug did not kill all the cancer cells, because the rim of the tumour was fed by normal blood vessels, these could be mopped up with conventional treatment such as radiotherapy or other forms of drugs.

> 'We were astonished this natural product had this much activity'

So far only laboratory trials have been carried out, but Dr Chaplin said human studies could start within 18 months if further work showed the drug was safe and left other fast growing blood vessels unharmed, such as those seen in wound healing.

In the laboratory, tests the drug had proved effective against cancers of the breast, colon, pancreas, prostate, lung, and the skin cancer melanoma.

The drug was supplied to the CRC by its discoverer Bob Pettit, of Arizona State university, who has made it his life's work to track down natural anti-cancer agents from plants or sea creatures. Details of the research are published in the lastest issue fo the America journal Cancer Research.

Dr Chaplin said: "As more than 90 per cent of cancers are solid tumours we are very excited about the potential of Combretastatin as a poweful new weapon to treat cancer patients. It also opens the door for the further development of other drugs working on the same principle."

He added: "We hope we can open up a new battle front against cancer, not just targeting cells but targeting the blood vessels that supply them. By killing just a few cells in the blood vessels we can kill many thousands of the tumour cells.

"Nature is the greatest place to look for new drugs. We were astonished this natural product had this much activity against tumour blood vessels."

The finding coincides with the launch today by the CRC of Britain's first national cancer day. Gordon McVie, director general of the CRC, said: "If Combretastatin or other drugs of this type prove sucessful they will be applicable to an enormous range of cancers because nearly all cancers rely on the blood supply to grow."

Natural sources of anti-cancer drugs

American yew tree: source of the drug taxol, licensed in the past year, for the treatment of cancers including breast and ovary.

Bryozoan: a sponge-like creature, which fouls the bottom of boats, from which the drug Bryostatin is derived. Can stop the growth of some cancer cells by interfering with the way they communicate with each other.

Chinese herbs: Researchers are isolating active ingredients to see if they are effective as anti-cancer treatments.

Periwinkle: This flower, particularly the Madagascan version, is the source of the vinca alkalois, such as Vincristine — key ingredients in chemotherapy, especially in treating childhood leukaemias and Hodgkin's disease.

Seaweed: Scientists are discovering that seaweed contains powerful susbtances which in some cases can stop tumours growing.

Sea hare : a poison allegedly used by the Roman empress Livia, wife of Augustus Caesar, to dispose of rivals to power. Two thousand years later it is about to be used in clincal trials as a cancer treatment.

Starflower or borage: Scientists in Greece and Germany are using extracts of starflower to treat patients with colon cancer. It is also used in herbal treatments for cancers of the breast and skin.

Fungi: A type called streptomyces is the source of several important antibiotics with anti-cancer properties, including adriamycin, doxorubican and bleomycin.

Mayapple: This plant has an extensive history of cancer treatment in native American folklore. Semi-synthetic derivatives of this, such as etoposide, are used in the treatment of cancer.

Camptotheca: A Chinese plant containing several powerful agents which act against cancer. Researchers are investigating man-made versions of these in clinical trials against cancers of the lung, colon, cervix, breast and ovaries.

— Chris Mihill

New heart drug hope

Chris Mihill, Medical Correspondent

A TYPE of heart drug given long-term to patients following a heart attack can cut the risk of death by more than 10 per cent, researchers say today.

Doctors from Leeds have been looking at survival rates in the five years following a heart attack in a group of 603 patients.

Alastair Hall and his colleagues from the Institute of Cardiovascular Research at Leeds university gave half the group a drug called ramipril for around a year, while others received a dummy pill.

The drug is one of a class known as ACE inhibitors which widen blood vessels, thereby reducing the strain on the heart.

The researchers say in the Lancet that, at the end of the study period, there had been 117 deaths in the placebo group (38.9 per cent) compared to 83 (27.5 per cent) in the group receiving ramipril — a cut in deaths of 11.4 per cent. This reduction means there would be 114 additional survivors at the end of a five-year period for every 1,000 patients treated. The drug costs about £9 a month.

The doctors state: "Once a clinician has decided to treat an individual patient with an ACE inhibitor after acute myocardial infarction [heart attack] therapy should be continued indefinitely, unless tolerance develops."

Dr Hall said yesterday that many patients who could benefit from the drugs were failing to receive them or were getting too low a dose.

Princess in Pakistan

Princess Diana lands in Lahore in a powder blue shalwar kameez PHOTOGRAPH: STEFAN ROUSSEAU

Political minefield for Diana in trip to aid poor hospital

Kamal Ahmed

LAST year it was pink. This year it was powder blue and, later in the day, turquoise. Diana, Princess of Wales, arrived in Pakistan yesterday on her second fund-raising visit to the home of Imran and Jemima Khan.

All eyes were focused on her choice of shalwar kameez, the traditionial dress worn by the well-heeled of Lahore.

During last year's visit her pink outfit brought admiring looks and suggestions that she was following the fashionable Muslim elegance of Mrs Kahn, nee Goldsmith, who wore a similar outfit in ivory.

Fashion experts in Britain predicted that Diana's choice of outfit would produce a new fashion craze here. But it was not to be.

This year Diana chose a powder blue shalwar kameez to disembark from Sir Jimmy Goldsmith's private jet, later changing into a turquoise version. Mrs Kahn wore a pale purple outfit, later changing into an olive green one. Her husband kept it simple in a white ensemble.

The princess is visiting Lahore to help raise £17 million in aid of Mr Kahn's cancer hospital, which offers free treatment to the country's poor. The hospital was set up in 1994 with £15 million in donations after the former Pakistani cricket captain's mother died of cancer.

Diana's trip has sparked controversy, as it did last year. Mr Kahn's political opponents claimed he was using the visit to raise his political profile. In the recent Pakistani general election his party, the Justice Movement, failed to win a seat.

"Diana is just being used to give Imran a boost," said Inbissat Rehlan, a former friend of Mr Kahn. He said donations to the hospital had fallen dramatically as Mr Kahn's popularity waned.

The princess said she was pleased about the British Government's decision to ban landmines, for which she has campaigned on behalf of the Red Cross, but would not be drawn on other questions.

"This is the first charity hospital in an Islamic country and the poor are very grateful," Mr Kahn said. "But it is expensive to run and we must raise more funds. I hope the princess's support will help us do that."

Diana knows that visits to Pakistan are fraught with political difficulties. Last year's trip brought a snub from the then prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, who at first offered her an official residence before realising that Diana was visiting one of her chief political opponents.

When the princess arrived for this visit, which has been given "semi-official" status, she was welcomed by a minister of the local government, rather than a national figure.

Yesterday she attended a VIP lunch with 60 guests. Today the princess is due to meet the chief minister of the Punjab state, Shabiz Sharif, the brother of the prime minister, Nawaz Sharif. She will also visit patients at the hospital.

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He is 30 years old, only 5ft 10in, but he weighs in at 17 stone of bull-necked beef. When he came to England from Ireland at 15, he spoke no English, only Gaelic. His fighting was eloquent enough.
Sport97 page 6

News in brief

Nurse gets life for drug murder

A NURSE was yesterday jailed for life after a Birmingham crown court jury found her guilty of murdering her common law husband by injecting him with insulin after making him drowsy with drugs. Marie Whiston, a 52-year-old Filipina, of Bordesley Green, Birmingham, denied murdering Eric Lloyd, 60, in June 1994.

The court had heard how Mr Lloyd, a car factory worker, had changed his will so all his property would go to his common law wife. Sentencing Mrs Whiston, Mrs Justice Ebsworth said: "You must have abused your position as a nurse to obtain both the insulin and the drugs."

Jumbo pilot averts disaster

A JUMBO jet pilot was dubbed a hero by British Airways chief executive Bob Ayling yesterday for helping to avert a potentially catastrophic two-plane crash at Chicago's O'Hare airport. Six tyres of the Boeing 747 burst as Captain Richard Westray and his crew managed to abort a take-off so they could avoid a United Airways Boeing 737 that had strayed on to their runway. The London-bound BA plane, with 335 passengers on board, managed to come to a standstill just 1,000ft from the United aircraft last Sunday.

WG's bat fetches £1,000

A BAT owned by Dr W G Grace, an England tour blazer and a rare book were among 300 items which fetched more than £77,000 at an auction of cricket memorabilia at Phillips in London yesterday. The bat, signed by 82 Test and county cricketers, including Jessop and Hobbs, and was presented by Grace to the Friends of St John's Hospital in London in 1907, raised £1,035.

But it was an 1804 book by T Boxall, Rules and Instructions for Playing at the Game of Cricket, which proved the star of the sale — fetching £5,520.

Father jailed for cruelty

A MAN who turned his five-bedroom council show home into a "pigsty" was jailed for 18 months yesterday for cruelty to seven of his 11 children. Social workers who entered the 48-year-old gardener's home in Southwark, south-east London, said conditions were the worst they had ever seen, the Old Bailey heard.

Seven of the children, aged two and 15, had excrement on them, the younger children's nappies were rarely changed and their hair was full of lice, the court heard. The seven youngest children have been put up for adoption.

The father pleaded guilty to seven charges of child cruelty on the basis of neglect. The man's 39-year-old wife, who has the mental age of 11, was acquitted of cruelty charges.

Kirsty inquest adjourned

AN INQUEST into the death of murdered schoolgirl Kirsty Tidman yesterday heard that her dismembered body, found in the Thames last week, had been identified by fingerprints, DNA and a ring. But Det Supt Michael Banks told the hearing at Poplar coroner's court, east London, that his officers were still trying to establish the exact cause of death. The coroner, Stephen Ming Chan, adjourned the hearing for 28 days.

'Infected' case was wholesale miscarriage of justice, judges told as appeal closes

System 'failed Bridgewater Four'

Duncan Campbell
Crime Correspondent

THE Court of Appeal must ensure that a miscarriage of justice on the scale of the Bridgewater Four case never happens again, three appeal judges were told by counsel for one of the men convicted of the killing of newspaper boy Carl Bridgewater in 1978.

The four men had been let down by every aspect of the criminal justice system, the court was told on the final day of the appeal.

Lord Justice Roch, sitting with Mr Justice Hidden and Mr Justice Mitchell, said judgment would be reserved and would take some time to complete. The court indicated informally during the appeal that the convictions would be found to be unsafe and that there would be no retrial.

Michael Hickey, aged 35, Vincent Hickey, 42, and Jimmy Robinson, 63, are appealing against their conviction for the murder of Carl at Yew Tree Farm in Staffordshire. The fourth man, Patrick Molloy, who was convicted of manslaughter, died in prison in 1981.

Closing the case for the appellants, Michael Mansfield QC, representing Molloy, said: "There was serious malpractice by a large number of officers in Molloy's case ... These four men were seriously let down by different players within the criminal justice system at different stages and at different times."

At least three officers, Detective Constable John Perkins, Detective Sergeant John Robbins and Detective Constable Graham Leeke, had lied at the time and had continued to lie, he said. The trial judge had failed in his duty to the defendants. Presumption of innocence had been turned into presumption of guilt.

An "infection" had entered the case right at the start, Mr Mansfield told the court. The investigating officers had decided that the men were guilty and had tried to ensure that they were convicted.

Mr Mansfield read out a letter written by Molloy about his treatment by police. He said he had been called a "thick Irish mick" and had had his teeth broken. He had been punched in the stomach and struck across the throat. His food had been heavily salted, and he had been left nothing to drink — he had had to take water in his hands from the toilet bowl.

The court owed a duty to the four to ensure that no one else ended up in the same position, Mr Mansfield said.

Westoning lower school pupils can look forward to new facilities with government-approved extra funds for opting out PHOTOGRAPH: GRAHAM TURNER

Education ministers forced to grin, bear and approve village school opt-out

John Carvel
Education Editor

WESTONING lower school in Bedfordshire was yesterday coming to terms with its status as the first to get approval from Labour ministers to opt out of local authority control.

Jan Marshall, the head teacher, acknowledged it was an odd time to switch to the grant-maintained sector, which Labour is pledged to abolish. Within 12 months, opted out schools will have to decide whether to revert to council control or take up "foundation" status with local authority representatives on the governing body.

Meanwhile, the Government has to approve the decision of parents who opted out under the old rules. Until the law alters, it has no legal alternative to providing extra funds to help schools convert.

Mrs Marshall said 86 per cent of parents had voted for the change. From July, the school will benefit from the funds provided by Conservative ministers to encourage opting out. These will include a transitional grant over £20,000.

"Our decision to opt out was not party political. We wanted to be masters of our own destiny. We didn't want to be a political pingpong ball and we are very interested in Labour's ideas for raising standards," Mrs Marshall said.

The budget of the school, which has 137 pupils aged four to nine, will increase from £174,000 to £240,000 on July 1 as it takes on responsibilities such as meals and transport. There will be other conversion grants and an opportunity to bid for extra capital investment from the Funding Agency for Schools, the quango responsible for the GM sector.

Mrs Marshall said she would be taking on a fifth teacher in September. She hopes to decorate, create a library and replace a computer. She cannot say whether the school will adopt the foundation status proposed by ministers; opting out is the best option for the next few months.

Nursery voucher scheme to end

John Carvel
Education Editor

THE Government will rush to abolish the Tories' "ill-conceived" nursery voucher scheme at the end of the summer term, in the first stage of a programme to deliver a free preschool place for every four-year-old by September 1998.

David Blunkett, the Education and Employment Secretary, said yesterday that local authorities would be required to submit "early years development plans" showing how they would provide places for all parents who want them.

Any authority failing to organise a fair partnership between council nurseries, voluntary playgroups and private pre-schools would be refused a share of the £129 million available for expansion, he said.

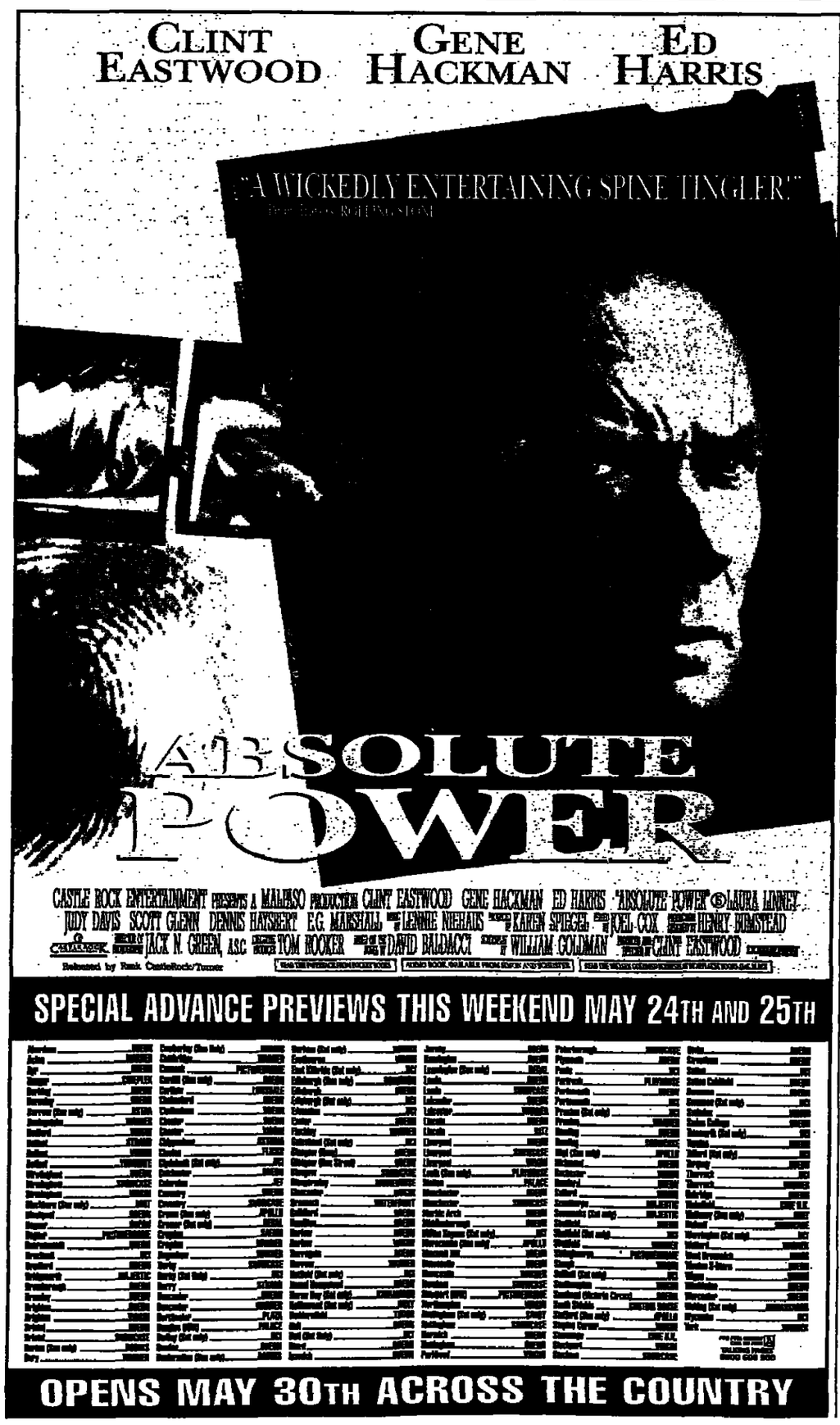
Although ministers were confident of providing enough places within 16 months, playgroup leaders feared there would be confusion for parents until the new system settled down.

Councils will be asked to produce voluntary nursery education plans for the autumn and spring terms before the compulsory scheme begins. In areas without a plan, parents wanting to send children to playgroup or a private nursery will be given a certificate worth £266 a term — the same value as the voucher.

Officials denied this amounted to exchanging one bureaucratic paper chase for another. The vouchers were a complicated system involving many coupons, but the certificate would allow parents to register simply, a spokesman said. It was an essential step to ensure a smooth transition.

Margaret Lochrie, chief executive of the Pre-School Learning Alliance, welcomed abolition of the vouchers. She said they created a competitive system, encouraging schools to squeeze four-year-olds prematurely into reception classes and forcing at least 800 playgroups to close.

Gillian Shephard, the shadow education secretary who introduced the voucher scheme, said its abolition would not free the resources to deliver Mr Blunkett's target of a place for every four-year-old. Administrative costs on vouchers were only £5 million, she said.



هكذا من الأصل

Ruling allows couple 'knowingly sold' defective right-to-buy house to sue council after facing huge repair bills

Ex-tenants win homes test case

Vivek Chaudhary

A COUPLE who claim they were knowingly sold a defective council house by their local authority were given permission yesterday by the Court of Appeal to take legal action against the council.

The decision could affect thousands of other former council tenants across the country who claim that they were sold defective council homes, under the former Conservative government's right-to-buy scheme, but were not informed of the state of the homes and were left facing huge repair bills.

The Appeal Court decision overturned a county court ruling that former tenants of Barnet council had no right to sue the council.

Yesterday's action was brought by Cary Payne and Debra Woodland, who bought their home on the Stonegrove estate in Edgware, north London, in August 1988 from Barnet council, which was Conservative controlled at the time.

At least 48 other residents of the estate also brought their own homes, which are large panel system (LPS) buildings. These come in kit form and are assembled on site.

Within weeks the former tenants claim, they were left facing repair bills of up to £10,000 and service costs of around £600 a month.

The Appeal Court was told that in February 1975 Barnet withdrew all LPS properties from sale because of their low valuations, problems with obtaining mortgages and likely problems with re-selling the homes.

Documents also showed that the council's housing committee in February 1978 expressed concern over the high costs of maintaining and repairing homes on the estate and that financial help was being sought from central government.

Potential buyers, however, were not informed of any of these problems.

> 'Labour promised compensation for homes with serious defects'

Lord Justice Brooke, sitting with Lord Justice Waller, heard that in August 1985, Barnet council, which is now Labour controlled, commissioned surveyors to look at the structural defects on the Stonegrove estate.

According to the firm's findings, homes showed extensive defects in the building fabric and many of these had been only superficially treated.

Other documents obtained by residents showed that the estate had problems with concrete less than 10 years after it had been built.

Dennis Harwood, of the Stonegrove leaseholders' association, said yesterday that Labour had promised to introduce a system of compensation for former council tenants.

After yesterday's decision they were hoping the Government would take action.

Solicitor Paul Butcher, who is representing Mr Payne and Ms Woodland and several other former Barnet council tenants, said after yesterday's the ruling: "My clients were never informed of the serious defects in their homes, but we need a political solution to this problem.

"My clients and others trapped in faulty council homes would like to see the Labour government take action.

"During the election campaign Labour promised to allow leaseholders to become council tenants again, and to introduce a system of compensation.

"We are hoping that this will happen soon under the new administration."

A spokeswoman for the Department of Environment and Transport said: "It is too early at this stage to say what ministers are going to do.

"We are keeping an eye on the case and the best way forward."

A spokesman for Barnet council said: "The council does not accept these allegations and will vigorously argue its case at any future court hearing."

Home sweet home turned to Hell

Vivek Chaudhary on dream turned sour

Bills, bills, bills: Ann Bradley in front of the former council maisonette she bought for £10,000 PHOTOGRAPH: GARRY WEASER

WHEN Ann Bradley bought her two bedroom council maisonette in 1987 it was the fulfilment of a lifetime's ambition. "I was on the verge of retiring and thought that investing in a home would be the best way of making my future more comfortable," said Ms Bradley, aged 67.

Two days after completing the purchase of her home on the West Hendon estate, north London, for just over £10,000, Ms Bradley got a surprise through the front door: a bill for £12,000 for urgent repairs that needed to be carried out to the roof of her block.

Ms Bradley, who had been living in her council home since 1971, maintains that she was never told about any problems on the roof and other defects in the building. "I knew that we would have to pay a service charge, but I never expected such a huge repair bill and it came as a complete shock to me. The bill was worth more than the house."

Since buying her home, she has also had problems with the boiler, heating system and windows. Soon after receiving the repair bill for the roof, Ms Bradley complained to Barnet council and was told that instead of £12,000 she would only have to pay £8,000.

Her service charges have also risen from £150 at the time of purchase to almost £700 today, and she has has just been given a bill for £2,000 for security to the estate.

Ms Bradley said: "This whole thing has left my husband and I very upset, and having these huge bills has meant that I have not been able to retire. If I had known that I would have had to pay out all this money and there were serious problems with the property, I would not have bought it in the first place.

"At my age, the last thing I want to be doing is taking on a heavy financial commitment."

Like many others on her estate, Ms Bradley has so far refused to pay any major bills and is waiting to see what the courts decide following yesterday's appeal court ruling. And like others in her predicament, she would like to see the new Government take action.

She said: "Labour promised they would help us and now we are waiting to see what they will do because we are under an enormous amount of pressure. For many of us, the right-to-buy scheme was a dream that's turned sour."

Dirty mattress link to cot death

Chris Mihill
Medical Correspondent

SECOND hand mattresses, if they are stained and dirty, may be a risk for cot death, but researchers say today they can find no evidence that fire retardant materials in mattresses are the cause.

The investigators say there is no increased risk of cot death from old mattresses if they are covered with plastic, particularly made from polyvinyl chloride (PVC). However, uncovered second hand mattresses more than doubled the risk.

Hazel Brook and colleagues, of the Scottish Cot Death Trust, investigated the deaths of 201 babies from cot death and compared them with 276 healthy infants, considering factors including sleeping position and parental smoking.

The researchers say in the British Medical Journal that these were the most important factors, with children placed in the prone postion — face down — at greatest risk. At death, 50 of the infants were found prone, although only 19 had been placed in this position when put to bed.

The researchers, at the Hospital for Sick Children, Glasgow, say the mattress finding was unexpected and did not relate directly to the number of siblings or poverty, although generally poverty was an increased risk factor.

"There is a increased risk of some kind, regardless of parity and social deprivation, for infants sleeping on mattresses previously used by others, although the risk was not established for mattresses completely covered by PVC. Our findings therefore lend no support to the hypothesis that household fungi interact with fire retardant chemicals in the plastic covering of cot mattresses and release toxic gases, which in turn cause sudden infant death."

The Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths, in London, said parents who could not afford a new mattress for each baby would be made unnecessarily anxious by the research.

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LEADER CONTEST

New 1922 chairman rejects calls for immediate wider franchise as ballot is fixed for June 10, but promises reform plan. Activists still plan to go ahead with 'alternative' election

Leadership contender Peter Lilley putting forward his case at a press conference yesterday, supported by Gillian Shephard PHOTOGRAPH: MARTIN ARGLES

Tory MPs stick to the rules

Rebecca Smithers and Michael White

CONSERVATIVE MPs last night conceded the principle that grassroots party activists will have a say in choosing future Tory leaders, but not in the six-man contest to be staged on June 10 to pick John Major's successor.

The compromise engineered by Sir Archie Hamilton, new chairman of the backbench 1922 committee after consultations with campaigners for a wider franchise failed to end the prospect of confrontation — because the reformers immediately made plain their determination to press ahead with their own, informal ballot ahead of June 10.

That raises the "Bennite" scenario, which split Labour in the early 1980s, whereby the 164 MPs who vote on the six runners will do so in the knowledge that 900 grassroots leaders have already picked someone — almost certainly, the former Welsh Secretary, William Hague.

If the MPs then pick someone else, that would deepen friction and put a question mark against the new leader's legitimacy. "That's a risk we'll have to live with, we're just hoping the activists are as confused (in their choice) as we are," one key player said. "It's a mess, but it was the only option with a pistol at our heads."

Sir Archie hopes he has defused a potential clash with activists by agreeing to bring forward proposals for "root and branch" reforms of the party's constitution before the summer recess. These will be put to the party conference in October, and once approved could lead to the new leader submitting himself for re-election next autumn.

In a Commons meeting lasting little more than 10 minutes, backbenchers rubber-stamped Sir Archie's plan to hold the election as soon as possible without a shake-up to the current rules. Meanwhile Robin Hodgson, chairman of the activists' National Union, made plain he will run his own parallel vote. All he would say last night was that he "welcomed acceptance of the principle of direct involvement of the voluntary party in electing the leader."

Last night all six leadership challengers made it clear that they would be happy to put themselves forward again under the new rules.

Nominations for candidates will close at noon on Thursday June 5 and the poll will take place on the following Tuesday, June 10. A winner will only be declared if he or she receives both an overall majority of the votes, and 15 per cent more than the nearest challenger. With six high-profile contendors already in the race, it is highly likely to go to a second ballot a week later.

"I think the committee is extremely relieved that an agreement has been reached and there is a way forward." Sir Archie said after the meeting, at which he read out a pre-prepared statement which was not even put to a vote. "The agreement of the National Union is important."

Mr Hodgson, who met Sir Archie beforehand, had called for nearly 900 leading activists to be given 20 per cent of the vote to elect the party leader. The party chairman, Dr Broan Mawhinney, who earlier this week wrote to party activists suggesting 15 per cent of the vote for constituency chairmen, denied that the decision was a snub to him.

Some who attended yesterday's meeting said there had been no call for a lengthy discussion or debate. "The mood was very much, 'let's get on with it so we can start afresh and forge an effective opposition,'" said one.

Other Tories who had sought an early widening of the franchise, were understood to be deeply disappointed, including former cabinet minister John MacGregor, one of the failed challengers for the 1922 leadership.

New Labour MP pressed to introduce fox hunting bill after topping Commons ballot

Rebecca Smithers
Political Correspondent

THE new Labour MP for Worcester, Michael Foster, yesterday came top of the annual Commons ballot for Private Members' Bills, and immediately came under pressure to steer a new law banning fox hunting onto the statute books.

Second in the lottery was Dr Julian Lewis, new Conservative MP for New Forest East, while Tory Euro-sceptic Teresa Gorman was third, former transport secretary Sir George Young fourth, Plaid Cymru MP Cynog Dafis fifth and John Burnett, new Liberal Democrat MP for Devon West and Torridge sixth.

Those in the top half dozen places have a good chance of getting a measure through Parliament if they opt for non-contentious legislation with widespread support.

Amid signs that the new Government may want to steer clear of controversial anti-hunting legislation, Mr Foster said he would be considering the various options, and had been trying to hide away from lobbying groups.

"It's come as a bit of a bolt out of the blue.I shall be taking time over the next week or so to discuss what is in the best interests of the city of Worcester and the people of this country because that is what I was elected here to Parliament to perform," he told BBC Radio 4.

Mr Dafis won environmental plaudits by confirming that he would be piloting the Road Traffic Reduction Bill, which would set national targets for reducing road traffic.

Sketch

No escape for a limping survivor

Simon Hoggart

BUSINESS questions came yesterday, taken by Ann Taylor. Most people assumed that she would be demoted after the election, but she wasn't, and so far has been remarkably successful.

This used to be a workmanlike, rather bland session, but the Tories have decided to use it for a last, defiant, rearguard action.

Until May 1, Mr Alastair Goodlad was the Conservative Chief Whip. Whips, by tradition, do not speak in the House of Commons, and for that reason he hasn't uttered a word in years.

Now he is the shadow leader of the House, and watching him learn to speak the English language again is like seeing the brave survivor of a terrible explosion regain the use of his legs.

His progress is slow and hesitant, but by golly he has gumption.

His prose proceeds slowly and painfully, as if propped up on crutches. "The Leader of the House. Told us. That. It might be. Possible to give. Us two weeks. Business in advance ... could. We. Have more time for. The House to debate the Referendum.

"Bills?"

You could almost see the nurses lined up in the corridor, cheering him on his way to the exit.

But then that film (the story of a plucky Vietnam vet determined that no lousy VC land mine is gonna blow his life away) gently faded, and we were seated in the one-and-thrupennies, watching a 1950s British film.

The setting was Stalag Luft Blair, the most impregnable prisoner-of-war camp, from which no serving officer has ever escaped.

Major Goodlad is the British commanding officer, in charge of the 164 survivors of the Conservative Regiment. Their brave six-week rearguard action bought invaluable time for the Allies, until they were swept away from their reboubt by the massively superior forces of the Neue Labour Wehrmacht.

Unusually, the Kamp Kommandant is a woman, played by that well-loved character actress, Ann Taylor.

"Vell," she says, her eyes slyly running over Major Goodlad with apparent approval, "ve may be enemies, Briddische major, but zat is no reason why you and I should not be able to ... cooperate."

He knows what she means, but there is a certain little lady back in Godalming whose picture he keeps in his breast pocket.

The idea of filthy Nazi lips forcing themselves upon his mouth makes him shudder with disgust.

"Neither I nor my men *cooperate* with Nazis," he says scornfully. "All those on the other side of the House have come here as lobby fodder!" he shouts defiantly. (That's the line I didn't make up.)

The Neue Labour officers behind her shriek with feigned amusement.

"Perhaps you do not know zat, for you ze war is over!" says one.

Another steps forward, wielding a whip, but Ann Taylor waves him back. Her lip curls in a smile. "Zis man has spirit!" she says.

And Major Goodlad is defiant. He knows the Geneva Convention. "The massive increase in political appointments in Whitehall is causing rising concern about the politicisation of the Civil Service," he barks, his eyes blazing defiance.

The Neue Labour officers shriek with more forced hysteria. The spurned Kommandant is angry.

"I must congratulate you on making your complaint on the politicisation of the civil service viz a straight face!" she yells. "It voz about to crack at zee end!"

Cheered on by his men, stout fellows such as "Nobby" Clarke and Patrick "Cormacky" Cormack, Major Goodlad demands that the deputy prime minister is taught the rules of order.

Kommandant Taylor sneers. "Perhaps you are complainink viz your Chief Whip's hat on, because *you* haven't got any lobby fodder!"

By now she is irked beyond reason. Just as she is about to slap him across the face she notices the soil in his trouser turn-ups ...

PETROLEUM CONTROL COMMISSION OF MALAWI

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The Petroleum Control Commission (PCC) of PO Box 2827, Blantyre, Malawi, wishes to instruct a Specialist Firm of Consultants to undertake a study of the Strategic Fuel Storage for Malawi arrange the finance and implement the findings hereto.

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   - The integration of the storage facilities with the lowest cost transportation routing options and the internal distribution network.
   - Arranging finance for and project managing of the implementation and construction phase of the storage facilities.
   - Consideration of the long term supply alternatives in Malawi.
   - Possible operatorship of the facilities and assessment of the manpower needs of PCC in connection with the strategic storage.
2. **The successful firm will have a very wide experience of:**
   - Down stream petroleum activities.
   - Ability to raise finance, project manage the implementation phase and train members of PCC to operate the storage facilities.
   - Consulting experience.
3. Interested parties are required to provide a corporate history, experience and demonstrate their ability to undertake this assignment to the requisite standards. Companies should include the basis on which fees will be charged for each phase of the project.

GENERAL CONDITIONS OF APPLICATION

4. Applications should be valid for 60 days starting from the date fixed for receiving them. No application may be withdrawn for any reason between the deadline for their submission and the expiration of the validity.
5. PCC does not undertake to award against this application or accept the lowest bid in any particular case. In addition, PCC reserves the right not to assign any reason for the rejection of an application.
6. The original and two copies of the application, which should be in the English Language, should be addressed to the General Manager of the Petroleum Control Commission, at the following address:

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   as to reach him, not later than 14:00 hours Malawi time on 18th June 1997.
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Socialist leader Lionel Jospin narrowly escapes getting wet when a vase holding a red rose, his party's symbol, is overturned in a pub in Calmont in south-western France where he was campaigning yesterday for the first round of elections which takes place on Sunday PHOTOGRAPH: CHRISTOPHE ENA

Chirac heads for the trap he's dug

An austerity programme after elections could plunge France into an autumn of discontent, says **Paul Webster** in Paris

DANIEL Cohn-Bendit, the student leader in the riots of May 1968, has been hanging around the edges of the French general election campaign issuing Cassandra-like warnings that France is on the verge of another social explosion.

Mr Cohn-Bendit, a German Green Party MEP who also has French nationality, believes that the president, Jacques Chirac, will pay a heavy price for calling an early poll to enable him to impose a powerful dose of austerity on France to prepare it for monetary union.

"The worst thing that can happen is for Europe to be built in the way Chirac and Kohl [the German chancellor] have decided," he said. "We are going to have a third or fourth round in the streets of France this autumn."

While Mr Cohn-Bendit, now 52, might be suspected of yearning for revenge for being banished from France for 10 years by a vindictive Gaullist government in 1968, the first signs that Mr Chirac has dug a political trap for himself are likely to emerge in the first round of polling on Sunday.

The vote for the Gaullist and centre-right coalition will be feeble in comparison to the total number of people who vote for the orthodox leftwing opposition or far-right National Front, and who abstain or cast a plague-on-all-your-houses blank vote. As many as 2 million people could fall into the last category.

The second round on June 1, when the right should benefit from years of gerrymandering, will probably ensure a majority for the prime minister, Alain Juppé. But the millions who voted for the opposition will then have to ask themselves how they can sway government decisions without the prospect of a presidential or general election before 2002.

Mr Chirac called the early poll to try to ensure political stability during negotiations over the single European currency. The Elysée calculated that, with five years of secure employment before them, even Eurosceptic government MPs would support an austerity budget to enable France to meet Maastricht criteria.

But, as recently as late autumn 1995, France was paralysed by opposition to a modest attempt to cut government spending. Since then there has been non-stop discontent, involving various groups ranging from lorry drivers to Air France pilots.

Meanwhile, Mr Juppé's popularity remains shaky at best, and over the past 18 months the government has lost eight seats in by-elections as voters have punished it for failing to bring down unemployment, now at 3.1 million, and for being seen to condone blatant corruption.

After June 1 the spontaneous protests of today will have more political coherence. The Socialist Party leader, Lionel Jospin, has used an unexpected opportunity to turn round the entire debate on economic and monetary union. He is suggesting that support for a single currency could be made conditional on a new social charter emphasising employment creation.

He is already in alliance with parties, like the Communists and the Greens, who say openly that they will bring the argument onto the streets if the single currency remains a purely capitalist project. Behind them are millions of voters on the marginal left and the nationalist extreme right who want European union dumped altogether.

If Mr Chirac has devised some ingenious way of satisfying the 60 or 70 percent of the electorate ready to undermine his policies either by allegiance to other parties or through abstention, he has given out no clue so far.

The "new elan" promised to the electorate by Mr Chirac is, as explained by his prime minister, merely bigger doses of the unpopular programme that Gaullists have been offering in government since 1993. But the prospect that Mr Juppé could be the first prime minister to chalk up two popular national explosions has not dented a look of jaunty confidence suggesting he believes his rightwing coalition still has the electoral edge.

Mr Jospin pulled off an enormous surprise by winning 47 percent of the vote in the 1995 presidential election. But there is too much confusion and airy optimism in his economic programme, notably over privatisations already in hand and youth employment, to convince the electorate this time around. Even if the combined left, which won barely 80 seats in the 1993 parliamentary poll, are bound to do significantly better now, revolutionary change seems beyond Mr Jospin.

Socialist divisions that led to five changes of first secretary in a matter of months have not fully healed and there is the ball-and-chain of outdated ideology hanging round the ankles of the Socialists' potential partners in government, the Communists.

With a record 6,300 candidates from dozens of parties chasing 577 seats, there has never been a more promising exercise in French popular democracy than Sunday's vote. Unfortunately the rushed campaign has left the impression that there is little to fight for except slogans — until Daniel Cohn-Bendit's autumn protest crop ripens.

Daniel Cohn-Bendit: predicts a repeat of 1968 riots

Federal Italy plan targets separatism

John Hooper in Rome

A PLAN for turning Italy into the most decentralised country in Europe was put before parliament yesterday in a bid to stem separatism.

The blueprint for a new federal republic would devolve immense powers to Italy's regions, and give them the right to raise their own taxes and decide how they should be governed. It would also give much more influence to local councils.

The project was yesterday presented to a commission formed from both houses of parliament created to reform the constitution following the virtual collapse in the early 1990s of Italy's old order.

Paradoxically for such a radical plan, it is the work of an all-party committee of MPs headed by a rightwing opposition deputy, Francesco D'Onofrio — a Christian Democrat who was once Silvio Berlusconi's education minister.

Until now, the debate over decentralisation has been all but monopolised by Umberto Bossi and his ill-defined vision of an independent or autonomous "Padania" stretching across northern Italy from France to Slovenia.

Mr D'Onofrio's proposal for an Italy split into 20 powerful regions means there is now an authoritative alternative.

On Sunday, Mr Bossi's Northern League is to hold an unofficial referendum on secession. It has boycotted the constitutional reform operation, but in an implicit recognition of the changed situation two of its legislators sat in on yesterday's session of the commission.

Other reactions were less positive. Mr D'Onofrio's plan was given a heated reception by opposition legislators on Wednesday.

From the other end of the political spectrum, Fausto Bertinotti, whose Communist Refoundation party holds the balance of power in the lower house, said he was "absolutely opposed to the idea of turning Italy into a sort of patchwork".

The principal problem posed by Mr D'Onofrio's blueprint is that it risks raising expectations the government will be unable to satisfy. It would appear to give the regions power over public works, agriculture, transport, posts and telecommunications, industry, employment, health, education and arts.

But there are worrying signs that unless Rome can find a way of meeting at least some of the demands in the regions, especially the north, there will be trouble.

Developments since the farcical raid earlier this month on St Mark's square in Venice have shown greater than expected support for secession in the north-east.

● Two men were arrested yesterday in connection with a fire that destroyed the historic La Fenice opera house in Venice last year, judicial sources said.

Yeltsin sacks defence chief

David Hearst in Moscow

PRESIDENT Boris Yeltsin yesterday sacked his defence minister, General Igor Rodionov, and his deputy, in a sudden purge of the military top brass designed to reinforce his control over an underpaid, disaffected and near-mutinous army.

In a television broadcast, Mr Yeltsin turned on Gen Rodionov, aged 60, a career general with a reputation for honesty and plain speaking, blaming him for the stalled military reform.

He accused him of presiding over an army whose generals built themselves alrge dachas while their soldiers had nothing to eat. "Soldiers grow thinner and generals get fatter," Mr Yeltsin said. "Generals have built dachas all over Russia. I wonder where this fashion came from? Generals are not interested in reorganising the army because they may lose their privileges. They are the main obstacle to implementing army reforms."

Shortly after the outburst, Gen Rodionov and Viktor Samsonov, the chief of general staff, were dismissed. General Igor Sergeyev, the commander of the strategic rocket forces, was named as acting defence minister, and Colonel-General Viktor Chechevatov, the head of the Far East military district, was strongly tipped to become the new chief of staff.

Gen Chechevatov first came to Mr Yeltsin's attention when he stood as a candidate in last year's presidential election and then withdrew in favour of the president.

He recently had to defend himself from newspaper revelations that he had built an enormous dacha outside Moscow, rumoured to cost more than £312,500. He said he borrowed the money from a bank. But loyalty to Mr Yeltsin was more important than the fine detail of the general's private finances.

The ousting of Gen Rodionov represents a victory for the president's chief defence adviser, Yuri Baturin, with whom he had publicly clashed over army reform in January. Gen Rodionov criticised Mr Yeltsin's personal entourage for destroying the country's defence capacity and repeatedly warned about the lamentable state of both Russia's conventional and nuclear forces.

Slovak plebiscite tests the water on joining Nato

Ian Traynor in Bonn

IN THE first full test of central European eagerness to embrace the Western security alliance, Slovaks vote in a referendum today and tomorrow on whether they want to join Nato.

Due to the policies of the controversial populist prime minister, Vladimir Meciar, however, Slovakia alone of the quartet of post-comunist countries of central Europe will not be offered admission at the special alliance summit next month.

And a political row over the ballot papers that raged until the last minute yesterday cast doubt on whether the referendum would be seen as valid.

After the government lost two appeals to the constitutional court, the interior ministry simply ignored the rulings yesterday and deleted a fourth question from the voting papers. Mr Meciar is opposed to the question, which is whether the Slovak president should be directly elected rather than by parliament as at present.

While a Yes to Nato vote is expected, the issue will be blurred by further questions on the ballot paper asking Slovaks whether they endorse the deployment of nuclear weapons and the stationing of Nato military bases on their territory.

A recent flurry of deals and talks with Moscow on arms supplies and military co-operation coupled with the floating of ideas of Slovak neutrality are also raising doubts on whether the Meciar government is as committed to joining Nato as its official pronouncements make out.

The Nato summit next month is expected to issue membership invitations to Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, effectively snubbing and isolating Slovakia. Five years ago Slovaks and Czechs formed one country. In less than five years, the new Nato front line will run along the frontier dividing Czechs and Slovaks.

Although Mr Meciar and his foreign minister, Pavol Hamzik, regularly assert their Nato ambitions, the ruling party has failed to mount a persuasive referendum campaign in favour, while the opposition has been lobbying loudly for a Yes vote.

At the end of last month, the Russian prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, visited Bratislava where he signed 16 agreements on trade and co-operation, including arms and military deals. Mr Chernomyrdin, bitterly opposed to Nato's expansion into the former Warsaw Pact, said Russia and Slovakia were "following the right road".

The Slovaks are said to be contemplating buying air defence systems and 16 "Black Shark" helicopters from the Russians, as well as having concluded deals on spare parts for their former Warsaw Pact arsenal.

The timing of such deals — a couple of months before the crucial Nato summit — has sent the wrong signals if Mr Meciar is really intent on securing Nato membership.

His coalition partners on the extreme right and left are vociferously opposed to Nato. The Slovak nationalist leader, Jan Slota, whose party colleague Jan Sitek is the defence minister, said he had obtained security guarantees from Mr Chernomyrdin if Slovakia opted for neutral status. Mr Slota sought similar guarantees this week from the United States ambassador in Bratislava, Ralph Johnson, but was turned down.

Mr Johnson asked whether "Slovakia has demonstrated a commitment to democracy".

News in brief

Albanian poll on course

Albanian political parties have withdrawn their threatened boycott of the election due on June 29, said the European envoy, Franz Vranitzky, yesterday. — Reuter.

Shining Path loss

Peruvian security forces captured the military leaders of two key units of the Maoist Shining Path, and a huge haul of arms, in a big operation in the guerrillas' jungle heartland, police said yesterday. — Reuter.

Sky-high stakes

Australia's national carrier Qantas is to seek government approval for in-flight gambling as part of a A$550 million (£300 million) fleet refurbishment. The plan includes interactive video systems for all seats. — Reuter.

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Khatemi supporters wave his portrait in Tehran this week PHOTOGRAPH: JAMSHID BAIRAMI

Iran's turbans conceal democratic intent as electors go to the polls

Voters have a genuine choice between presidential candidates with differing policies, writes **Kathy Evans** in Tehran

EIGHTEEN years after Iran's Muslim clerics launched a revolution in the name of the Almighty and Islam, freedom of thought has become the principal issue in today's presidential election.

Many Iranians are now demanding an easing of the restrictions which govern social life and freedom of expression. Women voters, too, want to have a greater role in this hitherto all-male political system.

At first glance, there is not much of a choice on offer: three of the candidates are clergymen, and the fourth a former revolutionary judge with a grisly track record.

But behind the turbans Iranian voters are being offered a real choice for the first time since 1979. The campaign's two front runners have sharply differing ideas and policies.

Until a few weeks ago, the contest was considered all but sewn up. The lead of Nateq Nouri, a hardline cleric and the powerful speaker of parliament, was unassailable. However, in the last few days support has soared for his moderate rival, Ayatollah Khatemi.

As the campaign closed in Tehran last night, Khatemi's young supporters — many of them young girls — stood by the roadside waving his portrait at passing motorists. Young men dressed in Western-style T-shirts and jeans shouted just one slogan: "Freedom, freedom". Nouri supporters were nowhere to be seen.

Nouri's supporters blame skilful spin-doctoring for the surge in Khatemi's support. Khatemi's campaign was managed by Mohammed Karbaschi, the slick mayor of Tehran who wears Calvin Klein suits.

While Nouri talked of job creation and privatisation, Khatemi dwelled on more populist subjects such as culture and the need to help youth. In a televised debate, he declared that the best way to fight the West's cultural onslaught was to strengthen youth from within, not through imposed laws.

Such tones have sparked hopes — probably unjustifiable — among many voters that Khatemi will legalise satellite television. Skilful spin-doctoring or not, it is clear that he has won the all-important vote of youth, women and intellectuals. In Iran, those aged 15 or over vote.

Nouri, in contrast, has other powerful cards to play. Two weeks ago, as the campaign got under way, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, told a workers' rally that they should vote for the most anti-American candidate and the one considered by the clergy as the most experienced and capable. The statement has been widely interpreted as favouring Nouri.

This has earned him the mantle as the candidate of the clerical establishment who can be relied on to maintain the strict controls on social life and the cultural values of the revolution. Women voters already fear a resumption of regular crackdowns to ensure "*hijab*", or Islamic cover.

Nouri is also supported by shadowy hardline groups which have dominated the political scene since the revolution. They include the Islamic Coalition, the Combatant Clergymen's Association, and the Qom Seminary Teachers' Association. These bring together Iran's most powerful and hardline clerics, the backbone of the revolution, and their support could go far in rural areas.

Although widely perceived as a moderate, Khatemi would be the first to eschew being dubbed a liberal. In Iran, liberal is an insult. His track record as a moderate was notched up during his 10 years as the minister of Islamic guidance, the government's main cultural ministry. While in office, Khatemi authorised the publication of new magazines, newspapers and novels. He also permitted the sale of videos.

However, his supporters are anything but liberal. They include such as Ayatollah Khoiniha, who led the students who seized the United States embassy in 1980. There is also the former prime minister, Mir Hussein Mousavi, popular among Iranians for his policies on subsidies to protect the poor. Another Khatemi supporter is Mohtashemi, who once supervised Hizbullah in Lebanon.

> Until a few weeks ago, the contest was considered all but sewn up

Khatemi's most powerful backer is Hashemi Rafsanjani, Iran's current president and second most powerful man. Rafsanjani has thrown the weight of his Servants of Construction group behind Khatemi, despite ideological differences. The group believes the need to develop the economy is Iran's top priority, overriding all other issues for the revolution. Khatemi would probably make Rafsanjani's daughter, Faiza, Iran's first woman minister.

Another advantage for Khatemi is that he is a "*sayyed*" or descendant of the Prophet Mohammed. Such status could go a long way in the provinces.

The one issue conspicuously absent from the campaign is foreign policy — both candidates have taken an anti-Western stance.

Nouri was badly damaged by the revelations in a local magazine which revealed the transcript of a conversation between his intended foreign minister, Mohammed Javad Larijani, and the Foreign Office in Britain.

According to the magazine, Larijani emphasised Nouri's desire to have better relations with Europe and the US — embarrassing the Nouri camp. Larijani subsequently disappeared from view.

The election is likely to be close, and concern has grown in recent days that it may not be free and fair. Khatemi supporters have been harassed by security forces and evicted from their headquarters.

The poll's outcome is likely to be determined by the third candidate, Mohammed Reyshari, for years the country's feared intelligence minister.

Three days ago, local newspapers reported that Reyshari was planning to withdraw from the campaign — rumours he vehemently denied — sparking suspicion that he may have come under pressure from the establishment after fears that his participation could damage Nouri.

News in brief

Turks push deeper into northern Iraq

TURKISH troops have pushed 125 miles into northern Iraq in a nine-day cross-border offensive against Kurdish separatist guerrillas, Iraqi Kurdish officials in Turkey said yesterday.

It is a much deeper penetration of Iraqi territory than previous incursions and follows Turkish reports that Iraq, Syria and Iran have built up forces in the region.

More than 10,000 Turkish troops, allied with the local Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), poured into northern Iraq last week in pursuit of Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) separatists who use northern Iraq as a base to launch raids into south-east Turkey.

The operation has been criticised by Turkey's Western allies and the United Nations. — *Reuter, Diyarbakir.*

Car bomb kills 12 in Algeria

A CAR bomb killed 12 people and wounded 50 yesterday in Boufarik, 16 miles south of the capital Algiers, said a state-run Algerian radio station, Chaine III, quoting security forces.

Boufarik is in the heart of a rich farming area and is close to Blida province, a Muslim fundamentalist stronghold. Algeria's official APS news agency said earlier that the bomb, which exploded just after noon, killed nine people and wounded 33. Officials were not available for comment. — *Reuter, Paris.*

Scores die in Indian quake

A POWERFUL earthquake that shuddered across northern and central India before dawn yesterday morning killed at least 35 people and injured several hundred.

Indian seismologists said the quake measured 6.0 on the Richter scale. It was centred about 12 miles from the town of Jabalpur in the central state of Madhya Pradesh along the quake-prone Narmada river basin. It woke people in New Delhi, 450 miles north-west of the epicentre.

Troops and army doctors were sent to remote villages, where reports of casualties were slow to arrive. — *Suzanne Goldenberg, New Delhi.*

Korean steel scandal grows

EIGHT South Korean politicians, including the mayor of the country's second largest city, Pusan, will be charged with bribery in a scandal surrounding the collapse of Hanbo Steel company, the chief prosecutor said yesterday.

Shim Je-ryoon said they were among 33 politicians named by Hanbo's founder, Chung Tae-soo, as having accepted money from him. Mayor Moon Jung-soo of Pusan will be charged with accepting bribes of £140,000. — *Reuter, Seoul.*

Arabs face death for land sale

THE Palestinian Authority said yesterday it had detained six Arabs on suspicion of violating the ban on the sale of land to Jews. Khaled al-Kidra, the attorney-general, said that if convicted they could face the death penalty under a Jordanian law inherited by the authority. — *Reuter, Gaza and Jerusalem.*

Argentinians clash over jobs

Argentinian riot police fire tear gas at right to work demonstrators in Libertador San Martin, Jujuy province.

750 fishermen missing

NEARLY 750 fishermen were missing in the Bay of Bengal three days after a cyclone battered the Bangladeshi coast killing about 100 people, fishing sources said yesterday. "Kabir Ahmed, leader of the Mechanised Fishing Boats Association in Cox's Bazar, said "No official search has been launched to find them." About 1,500 were reported missing on Tuesday. Officials said measures had been taken to prevent an outbreak of disease or hunger as people returned home from cyclone shelters. — *Reuter, Chittagong.*

Calm in last Taliban-free city in Afghanistan

Phil Goodwin in Mazar-i-Sharif

THE last big city in Afghanistan which has not been captured by the Taliban, Mazar-i-Sharif, is quiet and calm, despite claims by the ruling fundamentalists that they are within days of taking it.

General Abdul Rashid Dostam, the leader of the anti-Taliban alliance based in the north of the country, is consolidating his positions outside the city after two of his key commanders said earlier this week that they had gone over to the Taliban.

The commanders control strategic territory in the north-west, but it seems the Taliban are not in a hurry to move north for an imminent assault on Mazar-i-Sharif.

Gen Dostam's supporters in the city are angry that they are being portrayed as being on the verge of collapse. The shops are open and there is no visible sign of greatly increased security. The city's residents are openly hostile to the Taliban and support for Gen Dostam is strong. There is no panic, but there is a strong sense of unease.

The focus for much of the anger is General Abdul Malik, the commander who once helped Gen Dostam fight the mojahedin in support of the communist forces.

Gen Dostam is trying to win back the rebel commanders, but it seems futile. Gen Malik betrayed him publicly and said he was dishonest, a bad Muslim and was working against the unity of the country.

The key question which remains unanswered is how far the Taliban have exploited the rebellion. They say their troops are now on the frontlines in Gen Malik's territory in the north-west province of Faryab, and that they are co-ordinating operations.

But Gen Dostam's spokesmen say the rebels have not joined the Taliban and are not allowing Taliban troops to move into the area.

The north-west of Afghanistan is unlike the rest of the country. There is a mixture of different ethnic groups with no obvious allegiance to the Taliban. It is a fertile region which has largely been untouched by the civil war which has devastated cities and towns elsewhere.

Gen Dostam is not blamed in Mazar-i-Sharif for perpetuating the conflict. In the past few years, he has barely been involved in the fighting. The people see him more as the protector of peace and a liberal culture which are under threat from Taliban ambitions.

But he is now facing his biggest test. The terrain in the far north is flat and easy to attack. If the Taliban can use the rebellion to build up forces in the north-west, and can infiltrate from the south, Mazar-i-Sharif would be difficult to hold.

Bern gives voice to popular anger at foreign criticism of wartime role

Swiss hit back at US over looted gold

Owen Bennett Jones in Berne and Richard Norton-Taylor

SWITZERLAND yesterday hit back at US claims that its trade in gold looted by the Nazis prolonged the second world war. But the country admitted to "questionable deals" with Hitler's Germany and acknowledged its "faint-hearted refugee policy concernings Jews was inexcusable".

In the latest shot in the bitter dispute over the country's wartime role, the Swiss government criticised an official American report on its past conduct. It said the report made "one sided" allegations "unsupported" by evidence.

It rejected outright some of the report, notably the claim that Swiss neutrality during the war was incompatible with morality. In a strong defence of Swiss neutrality the foreign minister, Flavio Cotti, said the policy had performed a "towering national function for centuries" and enabled Switzerland to be an "oasis of democracy and freedom in totalitarian Europe".

He argued that neutrality had allowed Switzerland to protect between 100,000 and 200,000 refugees although he accepted that "the refugee policy concerning the Jews was inexcusable". Tens of thousands of Jewish refugees were sent back from the Swiss border during the war: many of them went on to die in the Holocaust.

The official report, which took seven months to research, was published two weeks ago by the US undersecretary of commerce, Stuart Eizenstat. It concluded that some of the gold brought by the Swiss from Germany in the war was re-smelted dental gold and personal jewellery from Holocaust victims.

It also claimed Swiss bankers showed an "indifference to the needs of the victims of the Holocaust and their heirs (which) persisted until the current international pressure came to bear".

The Berne government decided that it had to rebutt some of the charges even if doing so jeopardised its efforts to placate its foreign detractors. Swiss ministers are sensitive to their domestic constituency, which is becoming increasingly resentful of Switzerland's critics.

A recently published opinion poll suggests that most Swiss do not believe that they should apologise for their links with Nazi Germany: 82 per cent said that the wartime trade with Germany was a question of national economic survival or at least a justifiable policy for a neutral country. Only 12 per cent thought Switzerland had profited from the war.

The poll also showed that support is slipping for the government's proposed £3 billion Solidarity Foundation for Jewish victims, with a majority now opposed to its creation. The Foundation is a key element of government's strategy to restore the country's once pristine image.

The Foundation will be the subject of a referendum next year. Ministers and officials freely concede that a rejection of the fund would be a disaster. "I don't want to even think about a No," said Thomas Borer, the top Swiss official dealing with the country's wartime role.

Jewish leaders are also nervous of a popular backlash in the face of sustained foreign criticism.

"The Swiss still have to learn something," said Rolph Bloch, leader of the Jewish community in Switzerland. "They still think they are a moral paragon. Even if they didn't behave worse than many other countries, they still have to learn that they did not behave any better either."

Switzerland and the Allies agreed in 1946 to pay 250 million Swiss francs in gold (then worth $58 million dollars) — a fraction of the looted gold held in Swiss banks — as a contribution to European reconstruction in return for the Allies dropping all claims related to the gold deals.

"At the conclusion of the Washington Agreement in 1946 the parties to the signing realised all the essential facts. Thanks to their intelligence sources, the Allies even had precise knowledge of the Swiss negotiating position," the Swiss government said.

The Eizenstat report also criticised the attitude of other neutrals countries, including Spain and Portugal — and the Allies, for not adopting a tougher stand in post-war negotiations with Switzerland.

Recently-released documents show that the Allies, including Britain, distributed gold handed over to them by Switzerland after the war to governments of countries occupied by the Nazis even though they knew some of it belonged to Holocaust victims.

Flavio Cotti, a Swiss Federal Councillor (right), denies in Berne yesterday his country helped prolong the Nazi's ability to wage the second world war

هكذا من الأصل

CONGO: The new regime

A rebel in Kinshasa sports a leopard-skin cap once worn by Mobutu's presidential guard PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID GUTTENFELDER

Political minefield takes the place of battlefield

Chris McGreal in Kinshasa

AS LAURENT KABILA confronts the stark realities of Kinshasa's disreputable politics while trying to appoint a new government, he has also to hold together his own movement now that the common cause of bringing down Mobutu Sese Seko has been realised.

From the beginning of the civil war seven months ago, the single issue uniting the disparate parties of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire — and drew popular support for its war — was anti-Mobutu sentiment. But with the conflict won, and competing political interests demanding a role in government, Mr Kabila faces new challenges.

The inexperienced team must grapple with a wrecked economy, a dearth of funds to pay civil servants, endemic corruption, regional rivalries and, crucially, the lack of a political base for his alliance.

The speed of the conflict and its relatively low death toll has saved the new Congo from the traumatisation of mass killing. But fractures are already appearing as Mr Mobutu's political foes demand a greater role in government than the alliance is willing to allow, and ordinary Kinshasans question just who the victorious rebels are.

In other areas with longer experience of alliance government, tensions have been rising. In Shaba, the secessionist-minded southern province once called Katanga, resentment at the high profile of Rwandan Tutsis in the alliance has fuelled disgruntlement at its mishandling of everything from control of the exchange rate to the replacement of the governor with Mr Kabila's nephew.

Although the shape of the new national government is undecided, the alliance cabinet will be drawn from Mr Kabila's childhood friends, exiled academics and ageing revolutionaries who have acted as his ministers through the war.

The alliance foreign minister is a 29-year-old paediatrician from South Africa. The justice minister used to be a bail assessor in Philadelphia. The finance minister has a degree in agricultural economics. The minister of mines — a key post given the potential of the country's mineral deposits — knows nothing about the subject. He is an English teacher.

The alliance says the swiftness of the war left little time for long-term political planning. There are sweeping statements about democratisation, a social market economy and human rights, but no indication of how the alliance intends to address them or tackle deep-rooted problems.

Perhaps the greatest challenge will be to find funding. The alliance's desperation is obvious. Its officials have descended on businesses to hit them for "taxes". The difference from the Mobutu regime is that those handing over the money get a receipt and a promise that the cash it is not going into individual pockets. Mostly this is believed — for now.

Cracking the culture of corruption will be difficult. The key will be to pay civil servants and others in authority a living wage. Crucial to that will be the enormous task of persuading the Congolese to pay their taxes.

The alliance's attempts to convince foreign investors that it is committed to a free-market economy were undermined when it nationalised a *railway run by a consortium* of South African, Belgian and local interests.

Differences within the alliance have been apparent since its disparate groups were thrown together shortly before the start of the war. It is split between those who remained in Zaire through the Mobutu years — and are therefore suspected of being compromised — and younger, better educated exiles who are accused of arrogance.

Much real power continues to lie with a group of anonymous military commanders inside the alliance, mostly believed to be Tutsis from Rwanda or the east of the country. They are viewed with suspicion both within the movement and by much of the ordinary population.

Mr Kabila is under pressure to reduce their role. But even if he has the power to do so, Rwandan officers who led the military campaign continue to play a crucial role in running the alliance army.

In an effort to replace foreign troops, the alliance recruited furiously as each town and city fell into its hands. About 30,000 men have been drawn into its army, but there are problems of discipline. At times, rivalries between Tutsis and others have degenerated into violence, such as a gun battle which broke out in Goma last month.

Mandela offers technical advice

SOUTH AFRICA is preparing to offer technical advice and expertise to Laurent Kabila's new government in Kinshasa, but is unlikely to give direct financial aid, officials said yesterday.

Ricky Naidoo, a spokesman for Thabo Mbeki, the deputy president, said South Africa would co-ordinate assistance from African and other states to ensure that Mr Kabila had immediate access to advice and expertise to start rebuilding the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly Zaire.

"Now that the first stage of the peace process is over, we cannot simply pack our bags and walk away. South Africa still has a critical role to play in terms of sharing our expertise," Mr Naidoo said.

The president's spokesman, Parks Mankahlana, said Nelson Mandela was keen to help Mr Kabila establish control of the looted and vandalised government infrastructure.

But he added: "It's going to be largely technical assistance. We may not be able to offer any direct financial aid."

Mr Mandela has been criticised in the South African media and parliament for the cost of his efforts to guide the former Zaire to democracy. — Reuter.

Ruling party's colours pall in Indonesian poll

Nick Cumming-Bruce in Jogjakarta

THE saleswoman in the high-street jewellery shop had had enough. "People are already bored with the colour yellow," she snapped. "It's time for a change."

She was referring not to the gold rings and chains in her display case but to the small army of motorcyclists roaring around Indonesia's second city decked out in the colours of the ruling Golkar Party. Revving their engines to a deafening, synchronised beat, they were trying to rev up some enthusiasm for their electoral cause.

It seems they have made little impact. Campaigning ends tomorrow, leaving a week for the world's fourth most populous country to cool off after a build-up distinguished by a mixture of anger and indifference towards the party in power for 30 years.

Not that the result is in doubt. The turnout will be impressive, and Golkar's rivals, the Muslim-oriented United Development Party and the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI), will scrabble for little more than electoral crumbs.

Some [illegible] per cent of Indonesia's voters live in rural areas, where the dominance of Golkar, actively reinforced by the apparatus of state, is complete. The only question is whether Golkar will achieve its goal of more than 70 per cent of the vote.

Frustration with the party's unbroken domination, and resentment at the increasingly conspicuous gap between rich and poor, have helped make this one of the most violent election campaigns of President Suharto's rule.

"From the first, there was no indication that the young in the cities were interested in listening to speeches," Juwono Sudharsono, a political scientist, said. "It presents a macho catharsis, a way out of the drudgery of routines. It's the only way the urban poor can defy authority and thumb their noses at the rich."

But the violence is one factor distancing many voters from the electoral process.

"It's better for small people to stay out of politics, it's easy to get caught up in trouble," said Ari, aged 37, a bakery worker and father of two, as a squad of "yellow" motorcyclists roared past.

"Life is getting harder. You may make more money but you spend more on getting children in school. Before, there were real slogans that meant something; now it's just a war of colours."

Another factor has been the exclusion of Megawati Sukarnoputri, the daughter of Indonesia's first president, ousted by President Suharto's subordinates as leader of the PDI. Most PDI supporters shun her substitute.

In a gesture of defiance, Ms Megawati announced yesterday that she would not vote. She urged her followers not to vote PDI — a message that stops short of calling for a boycott, which is illegal, but may persuade many to follow her lead.

Many educated Indonesians express indifference to the ballot out of a conviction that it will change nothing.

One student, more preoccupied with finding a job than with politics, was thinking — like many of his friends — of spoiling his ballot by marking all three parties. "Everybody knows what the result will be," he said.

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Health in safe hands

But can Labour match the high Tory spend?

THE MIDWIFE is back. Labour, the political party which launched the national health service 50 years ago, has returned and is ready to implement its health pledges. Labour's opinion poll lead on health is larger than on any other issue: a massive 38 per cent. Even more reassuring for party managers, health is far ahead of all other issues identified by the public as a key political issue. No wonder it was to a hospital that Tony Blair went yesterday on his second public engagement since the election. Back in Whitehall Frank Dobson, the new health secretary, was setting out the Government's programme. How well will it be received?

The professionals will be delighted. After six years of Maoist administration — year after year of untried and untested change — Labour is promising the stability for which the service has yearned. The internal market is not being torn up. All new change will be evolutionary. Even the hated GP fundholders will be allowed to continue, although with firmer rules controlling their surpluses and ability to get priority for their patients. All further reforms will be piloted and tested. There will be no service-wide restructuring without field experiments.

All this makes sense. Labour was right to oppose the Tory restructuring in 1991 but the clock can't be turned back. There is no longer the old integrated NHS structure to go back to. Moreover, there was a lot wrong with the old system: stark under-management and unacceptable variations in hospital costs, GP prescribing patterns, and hospital referral rates. What Labour is proposing to do is to build on the modifications which the Tories had already begun to introduce. Even they had seen the madness of their ways and were moving to a less competitive and sharp-elbowed market. What will emerge is a more pluralistic health service with different areas having different forms of purchasing. The pilot experiments which the last government's Primary Care Act allows will be used to test Labour's alternative form of health purchasing: locally based GP commissioning groups.

What we have in health is a hidden consensus. Labour party activists may be dismayed having been told by their leaders how health was going to be renationalised, hospital closures blocked and the old system restored. But that, presumably, was one reason why Frank Dobson, an Old Labour man, was appointed to reassure the party that the NHS is safe in New Labour's hands. Indeed, in terms of public health, it offers much more. The appointment of Britain's first public health minister — and this week's plan to ban both tobacco promotion as well as advertising — should be applauded. But other serious problems lie ahead.

The biggest will be finance. Yesterday Labour made much of its £100 million savings from cuts to the bureaucracy. But this was pure flam with £46 million already saved by the previous administration's cuts and £20 million by delaying by one year the next wave of GP fundholders. Much more serious is the dire state of health service finance with one out of four trusts — and one in three health authorities — in deficit last month at the end of their financial year. This year's settlement is even worse and the next two the worst for 30 years with projected rises of a mere 0.2 and 0.1 per cent. Compare this with annual average increases of four per cent which the NHS has enjoyed since 1991. The Tories were so scared of their restructured NHS crashing they piled in the cash at a far faster rate than economic growth. Will Labour match this? It must. Nothing would so disillusion the public — and party activists — as a record funding shortfall.

Charge of the Nation-wideboys

The future of the entire building society movement is at risk

WHAT HAPPENS to the Nationwide — currently under siege from carpet-baggers — may decide whether mutually owned companies become a thing of the past. The Nationwide is, by default, the biggest building society in Britain now that giants like Abbey National and Halifax have become plcs. It is proud of being owned by its members and intends to use dividends which would otherwise be channelled to shareholders to keep its savings rates higher than the banks and its borrowing rates lower. Other things being equal this should give it and other mutual companies a big advantage over the banks in mortgage lending.

The trouble is that the recent crop of windfall gains has whetted the appetite for more. Five dissidents are seeking election to the Nationwide board in a move which is being interpreted as forcing a referendum on mutuality. The dissidents argue that members would have to live for hundreds of years to be better off with more competitive interest rates than if they walk away with a one-off conversion payment. That may be true, but the capital assets available for distribution have been built up over many decades, often by savers and borrowers now deceased to whom it never occurred that they might be able to cash in their endowment. In a real sense the Nationwide holds the fruits of past mutuality in trust for the benefit of present and future members.

This also happens to make good commercial sense because in its core business of attracting deposits for house purchase it could take the banks to the cleaners by consistently offering more competitive rates (as long as it doesn't squander its competitive advantage through overmanning). Indeed if markets worked efficiently then the £20 billion worth of capital windfalls from the conversion of existing building societies would be reinvested in existing mutuals, rather than staying at a less favourable rate of interest with the newly converted banks. It would also be good for the economy since the mutuals would continue to provide fierce competition in this area for the banks. It would almost certainly keep interest rates for borrowers lower than they otherwise would have been (and slightly higher for savers).

But the outcome of this battle, sadly, won't be determined by economic theory but by Mammon. Nationwide members would have to be extraordinarily well motivated to turn down an offer of up to £2,000 or more so that future members can have better interest rates. We hope they will be because there ought to be a place in a mixed economy, especially under a stakeholding Labour government, for companies steeped in self-help and longtermism. The regulator of the building societies should step in to ensure that the future of what remains of the movement isn't decided by the short-term greed of a group of carpet-baggers out for a quick buck. That's contrary to the entire ethos of the friendly society movement.

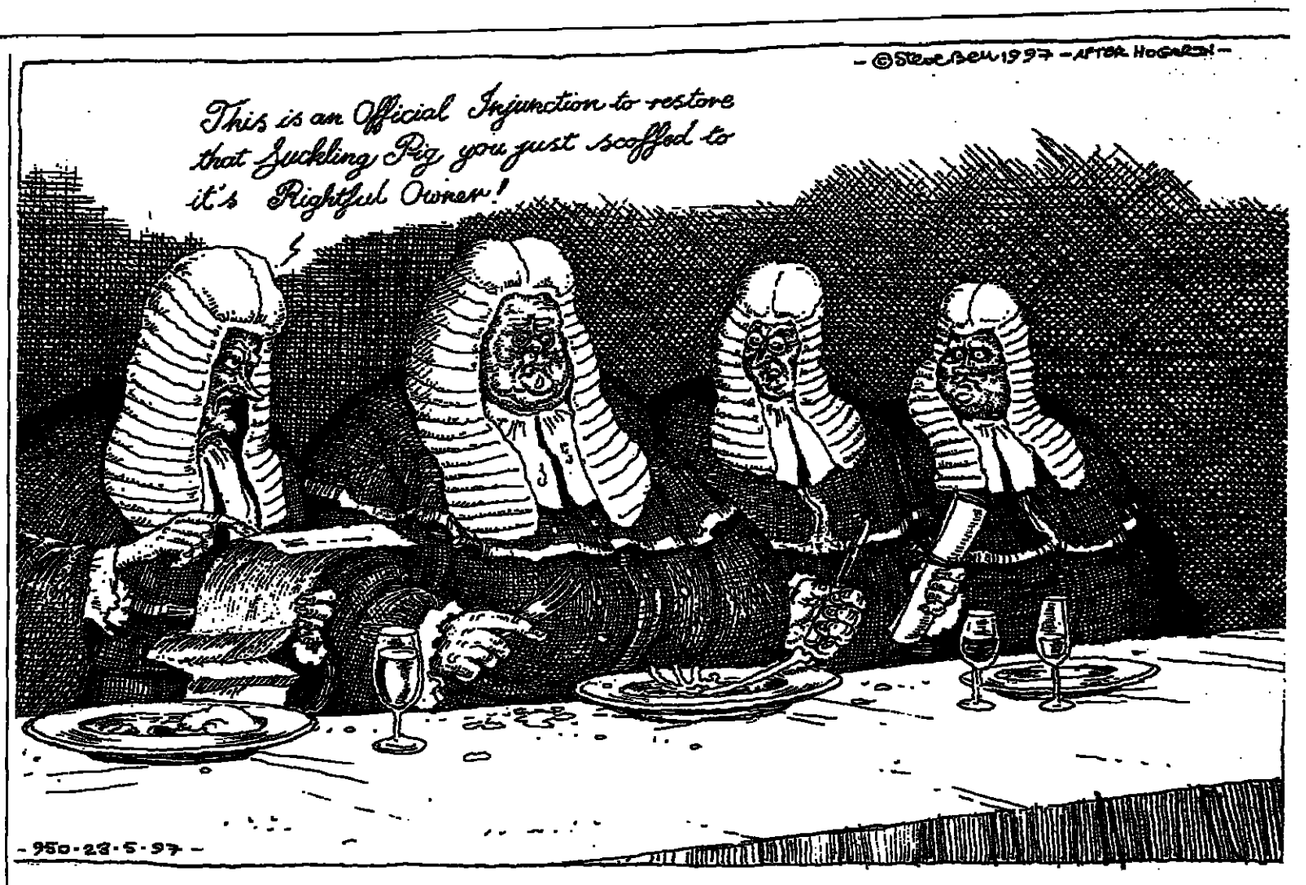
Drugs are not a fashion accessory

The problem is too severe to be seen in an acceptable form

BILL CLINTON'S intervention on "heroin chic" came about fortuitously: he was addressing a conference on drugs just after the New York Times had published an article on the use of "druggy" fashion images. This in turn was provoked by the death of a young fashion photographer from a heroin overdose, Davide Sorrenti. It is still an important statement for the president to make. Using fashion pictures which glamourise the spaced-out addict's look to sell clothes is not an aesthetic statement but an amoral transaction.

The defence for these pictures has been that they are projecting a revolution against artificial beauty and showing life as it really is. This is a far cry from the school of photo-journalism which (particularly in the US) has portrayed over decades the unglamorous reality of poverty and deprivation. The drugged-out kids in pace-setting magazines such as Detour (which published Sorrenti's pictures in the same issue which reported his death) are wearing expensive clothes and convey the strong impression of having indulged in an expensive habit. They are fostering illusions, not destroying them. Whether or not high earners for whom heroin has become the "drug of choice" can live with the habit (or manage to ditch it) without inflicting huge damage on themselves and those around them may be debated. But for every confident user of this type, there are hundreds who cannot afford to fund the lifestyle — or to pay for rehabilitation — and whose lives will be ruined by addiction.

Of course the drugs problem has not been caused by druggy pictures — nor by druggy magazine features or novels. But there is no reason to tolerate its exploitation for gain, and the problem is quite severe enough without allowing it to be presented in an insidiously acceptable form.



Letters to the Editor

How to save Africa's elephants

YOU state that Japan, the destination singled out in a proposal from Zimbabwe to the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species meeting in Harare, has "reliable internal controls" (Last call for jumbo?, G2, May 20). This is not, in fact, the case. An official panel of Cites experts visited Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia and Japan following Zimbabwe's proposal to downgrade the African elephant from Appendix I to Appendix II. Its report indicates major problems. In the case of Zimbabwe, law enforcement regarding ivory was found to be "grossly insufficient"; dealers were found to have issued certificates for the export of large commercial quantities of worked ivory. The panel also found that Japan's control of the retail ivory trade was "not adequate".

No one is questioning Zimbabwe's right to manage its wildlife resource as it sees fit. Live animals and elephant-hunting trophies can be and are legally exported from Zimbabwe. The single most important question is: should Zimbabwe's proposal (and similar proposals from Botswana and Namibia) be approved, will this stimulate poaching and lead to the widespread devastation of elephant populations in other African countries?

We cannot run the risk of returning to the carnage of the 1970s and 80s, when up to 100,000 elephants a year were being slaughtered. The proposals should be rejected.

William Travers.
Chief executive officer,
Born Free Foundation.
Coldharbour, Dorking,
Surrey RH5 6HA.

THE conservationists' long-term objective should be to see the optimum number of healthy animals supported on the land available. To do this, the local population must be convinced of the economic benefit of maintaining wildlife.

I was one of the World Wildlife Fund's earliest supporters. However, when WWF campaigned for the introduction of a Cites ivory ban, I resigned. I passionately believe that ivory sales should finance elephant conservation. In order to protect wildlife from poachers, cash from ivory sales should be used to equip and motivate well-trained local ranger patrols. Local people's well-being must be central, since success depends upon them.

Sentimentality and ill-placed sympathy for the animals will not save them. Only by treating them as economic capital will their long-term future be assured.

S J Andrews.
Bonny Green,
Morchard Bishop,
Crediton, Devon.

WESTERN animal lovers and conservationists seem quite content to regard the African continent as a vast zoo, which they can visit with their cameras and their guns. They have no care for the welfare of indigenous Africans and their need for land on which to grow food. In fact, these same conservationists bribe the African politicians to procure land, arbitrarily confiscated from the natives, to grow tobacco and other crops for the European and American markets.

If such conservationists really wish to preserve the animals, they should petition their governments to transfer the elephant, the wildebeest, the lion and the crocodile to the US and to Australia, where there are vast areas of land and many rivers for these animals to live. African people can then begin to take care of their own welfare.

Frank Bailey.
20e Colville Square,
London W11 2BQ.

THE Zimbabwean government has estimated that its stockpile of ivory is worth $3.5 million, not the £17 million you cite. Yet the government has not stated whether this includes the 10 tonnes which an international panel of experts recently discovered to have been smuggled out of the country. Meanwhile tourists — who come to Zimbabwe to see *live* wildlife — brought in $219 million last year. In Kenya, one live elephant has been estimated to earn over $1 million from tourism. You'd need to sell hundreds of tusks to earn that.

Of the 30-odd African elephant-range states party to Cites, only three have proposed re-opening the ivory trade. The vast majority strongly oppose such a move; but you clearly do not consider them worth a mention.

Susie Watts.
Environmental Investigation Agency.
15 Bowling Green Lane,
London EC1R 0BD.

Swift response to a slur

BEING temporarily in London between book tours abroad, I am intrigued to find my work and that of other British novelists being described as "parochial" (What women want between the covers, May 22). Beatrix Campbell appears to be jumping on a bandwagon set rolling by Professor Lisa Jardine, but both are riding over facts.

If my work is parochial, why have I been travelling so much on its behalf? Why has Last Orders been successful in North America, Australia and continental Europe? Why is it to be translated into 24 languages? Something must be getting beyond the parish.

Beatrix Campbell would claim that this is the result of a "cartel" of male British reviewers "indulging" male British writers. Here are some of the reviewers of Last Orders: Carmen Callil, Maggie Gee, Val Hennessy, Kate Kellaway, Claire Messud, Caroline Moore, Michèle Roberts.

The oddest thing about this hokum is that its instigators seem unaware that there is plenty of enthusiasm overseas for British fiction by both male and female writers — a sign surely that there is room enough in the world for all sorts of novels, and that good ones have a capacity to cross borders (and the gender divide) which makes partisanship look silly.

Who is being parochial?

Graham Swift.
c/o Macmillan,
25 Eccleston Place,
London SW1W 9NF.

Mis-representation of the people

RICHARD Tait, editor-in-chief of ITN, argues that none of the political parties was entirely convinced that a party leaders' debate during the election campaign was a good idea (Anatomy of a turn-off, May 20). This is simply not true.

The Liberal Democrats argued consistently over a number of years that a debate (or debates) involving the three party leaders would be good for democracy. This remained our position as we tried to negotiate an acceptable format.

The Conservatives' unwillingness to contemplate a leaders' debate until the eve of the campaign itself played a large part in the failure to agree on how it would operate. The frenzied atmosphere was simply not appropriate for holding detailed discussions.

The three parties should agree now to the principle of the leaders debating together next time. We would then have plenty of time to sort out the terms of engagement.

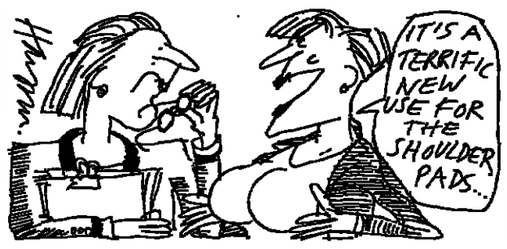
Dick Newby.
Deputy chairman,
Liberal Democrats'
General Election Committee.
4 Cowley Street,
London SW1P 3NB.

I HAVE very recently been involved in the only election petition brought under Section 93 of the Representation of the People Act 1983, and agree with Richard Tait that it imposes major restrictions on broadcasters.

My client, a successful candidate in a local by-election in November 1995 in South Wales, gave a filmed interview on an issue to do with toxic waste in the middle of the campaign. The BBC was not aware that a by-election was pending. The interview was broadcast the day before the election and my client duly won by one vote. The defeated Plaid Cymru candidate brought a successful election petition and my client's election was declared void.

My client intends to refer this matter to the European Court of Human Rights on the basis that Section 93, whilst seeking to provide an equal basis for all participating in the election, can through its construction actually prevent freedom of expression and information.

Gerald Shamash.
Steel & Shamash Solicitors,
12 Baylis Road,
London SE1 7AA.



Milk of human neurosis

HOW curious that those women cited as prolonged breast-feeders in your article about the launch of National Breastfeeding Week (Milking it, Parents, May 21) are apparently also "career women".

As an advocate of medium-range breast-feeding policy for all babies (nine to 10 months suited my own and my infant's needs), I have found that the extended post-partum pregnancy mode naturally inspires a desire to return to normality around this time.

Saddened in part at the abandonment of the nurturing principle, one nonetheless recognises the maturing baby's requirement for independence (breast-bottle-beaker . . . to barbecues). Unless, of course, you reside in the Kalahari, wish to limit your pregnancies, and don't own or drive a car.

Might not these career women be over-compensating out of guilt, due to the extended periods of time they spend away from their progeny, and the need to delegate their care to others? And come to terms with their own separation anxiety?

I, for one, was pretty damn glad to bin my 48 EEE bras. Nor did I wish to develop nipples like door stops.

Loraine Bates.
Mill House,
Brome,
Eye,
Suffolk IP23 8AL.

Mail chauvinism

YOU claim (18 years of certainty, 16 days of doubt, May 17) that the Daily Mail was "forced into an embarrassing climbdown" over Ann Widdecombe. What fatuous junk.

Your sleuth did not cite a shred of evidence for his claim that the paper was forced into "distancing itself from its own story about Widdecombe's motivation". I stand by every word of my famous "flowers, chocolates and dinners" stories.

Paul Eastham.
Daily Mail.
2 Derry Stret,
London W8 5TT.

Please include a full postal address. We may edit letters: shorter ones are more likely to appear. We regret we cannot acknowledge letters.

Behind the smokescreen

PAUL CLEIN (Letters, May 22) implies that tobacco companies should redirect their sponsorship to other product groups made by their diversified parents. He does not realise that the main tobacco companies in the UK market (including my own) are solely tobacco companies, so do not have this option.

We very much hope that we will be able to continue supporting sport through our sponsorship programme. This ranges from major sporting events to grassroots ones in the communities where our employees work, and include practical support as well as funding. Many will find it hard to get alternative sponsors.

We strongly believe that no-one starts to smoke, or smokes more, as a result of watching a sponsored event, though hopefully some existing adult smokers will try the sponsoring brand. We therefore hope that sponsorship will be allowed to continue, for the good of the sports, participants and spectators, as well of course as the good of my company, which is fighting hard for brand share in a highly competitive though declining market.

Paul Sadler.
General manager,
external affairs.
Imperial Tobacco Limited.
PO Box 525,
Southville,
Bristol BS99 1LQ.

THE tobacco lobby has consistently argued that tobacco advertising only encourages brand switching and does not increase consumption. If that were really the case, it should be actively arguing for a ban — since it would have no effect on demand while reducing its costs by at least £50 million (advertising spend) a year.

(Prof) Neil Kay.
Economics department,
University of Strathclyde.
100 Cathedral Street,
Glasgow G4 0LN.

CLIVE Turner (Letters, May 22) really does have an exquisite way with words. He understands, as well as the rest of us, that the conclusions he draws about advertising only affecting brand-choice in a mature industry are honest only where the same people continue to make up his static pool of consumers.

In real life, his customers die off from age as well as smoking-related disease; his market base depends, therefore, on being able to recruit new converts from the young and impressionable. This is why his industry finds advertising and sponsorship attractive and why legislation is well overdue to control the marketing of a dangerous product.

(Dr) David Coe.
58 Fairlawn Drive,
East Grinstead,
West Sussex RH19 1NT.

Drink up

I AM delighted that Lord Lloyd-Webber has made such a handsome profit from his cellar (Report, May 22). Could the Chancellor not impose a wine windfall tax? In the unlikely event that Lloyd-Webber objected, he could always leave the country.

Peter Bradshaw.
17 Gresford Avenue,
Liverpool L17 2AN.

A Country Diary

GLOUCESTERSHIRE: Moles are becoming a problem in one area of our pastureland and although I am prepared to kick the friable soil of the odd molehill around as a top dressing there comes a level of morning disturbance which exceeds the tolerable. We have come close to that level, with three or four new molehills every morning. I consulted Yellow Pages — no entries for molecatchers. None on the internet either in response to my search enquiry. I was reminded of that memorable comedy character Lady Cecilia Molestrangler, an invention of the late Kenneth Horne, but she too was conspicuous by her absence from the listings. Clearly, I shall have to arrive at my own solution on the mole front. On the ovine front, we finished lambing only last Thursday evening when No 28, a one-year-old first-time lamber, made all the signals of imminent action and then came to a halt. We have done well with the first-time lambing ewes — three have quietly gone into the hedge and managed the experience unaided. Iodine on the umbilical cord and some words of encouragement on the lines of "Well done, girl, what a lovely lamb" have been the only necessary intervention. But No 28, an entirely amiable young ewe, walked into a field shelter clearly aware that she needed help. And indeed she did, for it was a breech presentation with back feet already appearing as we considered the problem. Ewes cannot, with natural contractions, get a breech presented lamb out. The second problem is that human intervention can fail if you are too slow. As the cord breaks and the first breath is taken, you can drown the lamb in amniotic fluid if you have not got the head out in the air. The lady shepherdess did brilliantly. Notwithstanding a very tight exit, copious use of KY jelly enabled her to inch the lamb out and No 28 responded instantly to the wet bundle of lamb we placed beneath her nose and was instantly into the licking dry routine.

COLIN LUCKHURST

هكذا من الأصل

هكذا من الأصل

Diary

Matthew Norman

THE poetic oeuvre of Neil Hamilton continues to grow at such speed that experts predict he may soon replace Pam Ayres as popular culture's best-loved odesmith. Two more of Neil's poems have reached the Diary. The first was sent by an old schoolfriend, and was published in the Amman Valley Grammar School magazine in 1967. It is called The Dead. "Most people say/ That a man's not dead/ Till the heart's pumping stops/ And the blood congeals," it begins. In what more fanciful scholars view as a prescient vision of the colleagues he has left at Westminster, he concludes that the real deceased are in fact: "The ones with the minds that are dead/ And whose purpose in life is vague". The second poem, a more recent effort, is thought to crystallise perfectly the progression of his technique. It was sent anonymously, and is called Brown Envelope.

"Brown Envelope, Brown Envelope,
Now that you're gone, how shall I cope?
You were my mate, you were my mucker
Without you, old chum, I crave fiscal succour
You were adorable, you were inspired
My sweet envelope, from Mr Al-Fayed."

DAVID Robjant writes from Trowbridge to congratulate his local paper, the Wiltshire Times, on living up to its editorial policy statement — "Our policy is to provide readers with a fair, accurate and balanced news and information service" — with rigour. As evidence, Mr Robjant cites last week's front-page story, which correctly reported that the newly created county council is under no overall control (albeit with a working majority for a Lib-Lab alliance). The headline was: "New look authority is true blue once again".

THE Diary's Book of the Month jury is even now scanning Joining the Rainbow, Bel Mooney's novel based on her experiences as an eco-warrior, for suitability, and will report early next week. What a month this is proving for Bel. Apart from the publication of this book and no fewer than two others, she appears in Woman's Journal, where she muses on what makes a great mother. In a piece notable for an unexpected reference to the "liberated Sixties (when my generation really did think we could rule the world, changing it for the better. I wanted to read, learn, experience, make love, write poetry . . .)", Bel offers one of those sublime insights with which she has made her name. "It takes more than having a baby," she reveals, "to transform you into a mother." How true, and how wise.

FROM a possible Book of the Month of today to an absolute certainty of tomorrow. A press release has arrived from Faber and Faber announcing the publication in September of Blair's 100 Days by Dolly Draper. The book, we are told, "will take readers to the very heart of New Labour. From Transport House to Soho House . . . it will chronicle the action as it unfolds, analysing and delving into history where necessary" (where necessary?). "Blair's 100 Days will combine unrivalled background knowledge of the modernisers project thus far with unique access to every level of the Labour party." We cannot wait.

AN ideological chasm has opened up between New Labour and the Taliban, the Islamic fundamentalist militia ruling Afghanistan, over facial hair. Although once the wearer of a moustache himself, Mandy Mandelson is known to take a hard line, but the Taliban dissents: in Kabul 84 civil servants have just been sacked for trimming their beards. Maulawi Rafiullah Mauzin, President of the Department for Promoting Virtue and Preventing Vice (Mandy's direct counterpart) explains: "Beards must be long enough to come out of a clenched fist held at the base of the chin. It does not matter who the person is . . . if he has trimmed his beard we will replace him."

Face to face with Jack Straw's demon

Decca Aitkenhead

NOBODY has ever discovered what happened to Jack Straw when he was a little boy, but it must have been extremely unpleasant. For it appears that our new Home Secretary has blocked out every memory of what it was ever like to be a child. If the past is another country for normal people, then childhood is another planet for Mr Straw, and one he is busy re-classifying as an official waiting room for the little aliens' first appearance in court.

As we know, this is not an unusual psychological affliction for a modern Home Secretary. It is rather more surprising that so many other people should share it. Kids, we hear, are *quite frankly* out of control — nasty little thieving thugs, running wild half the night doing drugs and God knows what. And that's just the under-11s.

So when Jack Straw told the Police Federation on Wednesday about his curfew plans, whereby those found out after dark will be picked up, taken home, and — if domestic arrangements are judged not up to scratch — carried off to a kind of dog pound for stray children, it wasn't just the police who hailed it as an urgently needed idea. Everyone I consulted later that day on where actually to find some of these baby Krays agreed that the little villains were everywhere. *Everywhere!* Any estate I cared to visit would be swarming with the buggers.

And sure enough it was. Or it was, if you count gaggles of eight-year-olds playing on their bikes at seven o'clock on a soft May evening. ("Look at them!", cried the six-foot-something former football hooligan who'd brought me here. "See what I mean?")

The Marquess estate is a twisting concrete tangle in the bit of Islington not brought to mind by mention of the Blairs. It doesn't enjoy a good reputation, and police cars routinely idle their way through the blocks after dark. But by eight o'clock the only kids still out were a dozen 10- and 11-year-old boys, playing football on a corner of grass.

They are allowed out until half past eight, they explained; one or two claimed nine o'clock. If they aren't in on time, they get grounded for a couple of days. The "most illegal thing" admitted to is breaking a window, sort of by mistake, with a catapult. They each claim to have once seen a mate "light a firework and shove it up a cat's bum" — which is funny, as that's exactly what we used to say at school, and to my knowledge I have never met anyone who has actually witnessed or carried out this feat. One of them stayed out until 1 am once — "drinking wine and eating cheesecake and everything" — but this was with his mum at a wedding. They have the bursting wide eyes and breathless energy of small boys with soft limbs on a summer evening.

The trouble is, they're not actually allowed to play football on the grass, and an old woman is always on at them about this. But the fenced-off Tarmac area for ball games is about a third the size of a tennis court, and is also covered in broken glass and bottles. There isn't a youth club for kids their age.

So why can't they just stay indoors, out of sight? Probably because several of them share two-bedroom flats with four or five others, and the walls are paper thin, and the TVs blare, and the balconies are strangled by hanging laundry, and these are young children who want to play out with their mates after a boring day in school.

One of the boys has a different tone to the others. He is sharper, quicker, and affects a careless swagger. "I'm allowed out 'til when I want. Ten. Eleven. Twelve," he shrugs. Soon he's claiming 1.30am, and even the boys are shrieking "He's lying!", but they agree he's far more free to roam than they are.

"Sometimes the police say, how come you're out this late? I just tell 'em to shut up. They're pricks. They come up to you and say, 'We think you're carrying an offensive weapon'. They pull you up for nothing. They take me down the station and search me. As for getting drunk with my mates? Oh, loads of times. Yeah, all the time really. Nearly every day, in fact."

So this little boy, then, is the demon target of Jack Straw's curfew. As he talks, a number of things become manifestly obvious. The first is that he is strikingly bright; the sort of child middle-class parents thrill over, as they bustle about instructing the school to find activities to "stretch" their clever son. The second is that he is wildly exaggerating his encounters with the police, flourishing the anecdotes like a Boy Scout with orienteering badges. And the third is that he will carry on getting into trouble with the police, because a trip down the station is actually a trophy for a bored and lively boy who can't see how else to prove himself.

Of all the pointless, wasteful things to happen in his life, it is this: that the police have become his personal challenge. And now, Jack Straw is confirming this for him — the police really will be able to pick him up for nothing, and he and his family really will be criminalised. When he tells the others that the police pick on them for no good reason, the boys still look doubtful; he will have less trouble convincing them soon.

> A trip down the station is a trophy for a bored and lively boy who can't see how else to prove himself

Jack Straw's stroppy retort to those liberals who find notions of youth "crack-downs" and curfews troubling is always this: It's all very well for *them*, with their Hampstead conscience, but they don't have to live on these estates with these tearaways. He and his colleagues' children, on the other hand, do not have to live in these cramped little flats either.

His government may well be committed to helping families who play by the rules; but if the rules are that these kids must grow up in tiny homes crowded together with nothing for them to do, and nowhere for them to play, he ought not be too surprised if they have trouble keeping them.

An hour or so later, I take a walk back through the Marquess estate. The only people out by now are a couple of elderly men walking their dogs, and a young woman heading home. Perhaps the Marquess is not bad enough, after all. Maybe all the really wicked children live somewhere else. After a careful tour of half a dozen or so of Hackney and Dalston's bleakest estates, the dangerous little thugs bringing cities to their knees are still strangely elusive. And then, at a bit after midnight, I find a group of six lads sitting on a wall.

Two of them are doing their GCSEs. The others have been out of school a year or so. None has found a job; none has been able to get into college. One has done a year inside. These are the "youths" Straw fears those boys playing football will become, unless the police crack down hard on them.

They have been dealing with the police since they were 11 or so. The youth club closed down, the arcade was raided; when they get really bored, they nick sandwiches from the 24-hour garage. "I'm bored," says one quietly, "like I wanna die." School was "mad", so they didn't work for exams; they'd really like to be pilots, businessmen and solicitors, but think it's probably too late now.

What Jack Straw has forgotten is that adolescence is an achingly boring hell, and the only way you persuade teenagers to get through it without too much damage is with the promise of a life worth waiting for on the other side. If he wants to stop the children from getting into trouble, he should worry more about giving them something to hold out for, and less about finding something for them to fight.

One of the boys says he wants to be a journalist. I write down the Guardian's number for him, and tell him to call and arrange some work experience. All summer, we have young people here for this, organised by their parents or colleges. As I leave, his friend grabs the number and crumples it. And maybe there goes just another casualty of being a bored teenager on an estate in Hackney.

Why can't our fiction writers get real?

Bel Littlejohn

SENSITIVE? Literary? You bet. Over the years, I have often been described as "our most acutely sensitive literary critic". Whilst less sensitive critics can only manage 100-150 pages a day, I can guarantee to read two, three, even four major literary novels in a day and not only that but to have delivered an acutely sensitive literary judgment on them live on Radio 4 before 10pm the same day.

For this reason, I currently rank as one of the most sought after literary jurists in this, or, indeed, any other country. Over the past six months, I have been a judge of no less than eight separate literary prizes, for which I have been forced to read 272 works of non-fiction and 323 works of fiction — and this does not include poetry (576 poems in 3 weeks, including 3 epics, 14 elegies and 24 haikus), for which prize money totalled £46,721.36, a free BA club class return to Los Angeles, a portable Apple Mac, a complete set of Berol fibre-tip pens and a Rumbelows voucher exchangeable for £25.95 worth of electrical goods. Only last week, I was contacted by the organisers of the Booker Prize in the hope that I could squeeze in 157 new novels for a shortlist at the end of September. Meanwhile, I have had the privilege of serving as this year's joint Chair of the Orange Prize for women's fiction, selecting a shortlist of 20 novels by women from an initial entry of 224, and all in little under 5 weeks 3 days.

This, I think you will agree, uniquely qualifies me to deliver an overview on current literary trends in the national and international arena, and my devastating *critiques* are taken with all due seriousness by senior news commentators, editors and literary experts. For the past few weeks, I have been happy to ghost-write the major pronouncements of my good friend Professor Lisa Jardine in these areas, Lisa herself being tied up with reading her way through the 112-strong shortlist for the new £43,000 Redhead Literary Prize for Fiction Written by Redhead Women in New Zealand Between the Ages of 35 and 51, a prize that has met with a fair bit of controversy ever since top New Zealand woman novelist Keri Hulme was photographed by a security camera buying a bottle of henna in Auckland last week.

Personally, I am deeply — and sensitively — upset by the manner in which the British novel is growing increasingly parochial, sidelined on the world market by ambitious *international* novels written by *international* novelists who are not frightened to address wider issues, bigger issues, taller issues, longer issues — with no time at all for small or medium-size issues, preferring extra-large issues for men and women, gentle, absorbent, kind to your senses and bonded and quilted for all-weather protection.

We need to expand our horizons. The British novel has become increasingly insular, dealing only with British men, women and children in stories set more often than not in Britain, with very few day-trips to France, Holland or neighbouring countries. How much more fascinating the work of, say, Canadian novelists, who set their works in foreign countries like, for instance, Canada, or novelists from Greece, who are not content to write about everyday family life in south-east London, choosing instead to take the bold decision to set their tales of everyday family life in the colourful, panoramic, distinctively *international* world of south-east Athens.

I LIKE a new work of fiction to stop me in my tracks, to challenge and arrest me, and to carry conviction. Small wonder that British fiction down the centuries has made so little impact on the world stage. If only that consummate Little Englander Jane Austen had gone for the broader canvas, and had had the guts to let the plot of Sense And Sensibility sweep across 4 centuries and 6 continents, 8 time-zones and 10 narrative conventions rather than confining it to the itsy-bitsy goings-on of a small toffee-nosed community somewhere boring in the Home Counties, then she might have succeeded in gaining a much-coveted niche for herself in the world of international letters. And look at poor old Henry James: his characters just think and talk, talk and think, hardly ever meeting anyone beyond their narrow social circle, and rarely managing to nuance the complexities of their post-colonial sensibilities beyond the narrative constraints of their insular horizons.

We, too, need to enlarge our horizons. Our fiction must pay as much attention to the problems confronted by 5 generations of goat-farmers in Papua New Guinea as to the marital breakdown of a married couple in North London. We British have become too parochial, too insular, too turned in on ourselves. Shame on us!

Next week: Bel Littlejohn salutes the re-birth of the socially-concerned novel tackling the problems faced by one-parent families in east Tyneside and rejoices in a verse drama confronting the dilemma faced by a lifelong socialist when her child is offered a place in a grant-maintained school.

Spaced out . . . an image of fashion as seen in The Face PHOTOGRAPH: CORINNE DAY

Heroin chic? Just say no

Yes, fashion does peddle money, sex and power. But, says **Laura Craik**, President Clinton is wrong to blame it for persuading people to turn on to hard drugs

PRESIDENT Clinton has criticised the fashion industry for promoting what he refers to as "heroin chic" — a snappy yet meaningless little moniker commonly used within the frock world as an umbrella expression to describe anyone, in real life or in the pages of a fashion magazine, who looks too thin, too tired or too ill. Heroin is *not* chic, yet certainly within the last few years the fashion industry has had a long and languid flirtation with wasted-looking, blank-eyed models, who have been used to sell everything from the prettiest floral tea-dress to the latest designer scent.

"You do not need to glamourise addiction to sell clothes," says the President. Fashion is not Clinton's business: it is understandable that he should perhaps be baffled by the selling clout of an undernourished 16-year-old who looks like she needs a good sleep. But the kids seem to lap it all up, and the kids and their moral welfare are what Clinton must concern himself with. No doubt the recent tragic heroin-related death of Davide Sorrenti, son of prominent American fashion photographer Francesca, has played some part in prompting his remarks. The death of a member of fashion's inner circle has certainly been the catalyst for a lot of guilty soul-searching.

But who exactly is guilty, and of what? For Clinton to have singled out the fashion industry is surely a facile exercise in finger-pointing that ignores the glamorous status heroin enjoys in the music and film worlds as well. Fashion is an easy target. The stick-thin models that lope through its domain are highly visible signs of possible malady and possible drug abuse. Myths abound that models shoot smack between their toes to avoid track-marks in their arms. If a top model was a known drug addict, would her agency dare to intervene, so long as she turned up for her jobs and kept making them money?

> Fashion is often foolish, sometimes shady. But it isn't evil. It doesn't peddle drugs. The bloke on the street corner does that.

The fashion world might be shady, but it is also a multi-million-pound industry America needs and values. Yes, it's a powerful medium: wordlessly, beautifully, nobody would deny it has the ability silently to seduce. Fashion peddles money, sex and power. It preys on the inadequate. It fools you into thinking you want things you don't need and need things you don't want. Fashion is often foolish, sometimes shady. But it isn't evil. It doesn't peddle drugs. The bloke on the street corner does that.

The Face has often been accused of perpetrating the myth that heroin is "cool". Yesterday, there weren't enough Face staff to cope with the international demand for TV appearances and off-the-cuff quotes requested by tabloids ("oh, it's so disgusting that they've used a pin-thin, grey-skinned model in that fashion story. Let's reprint the picture on our front page"). Flattering — yet kind of daunting, in this context — to be held up as the most influential international fashion magazine amongst style-conscious young people today. People want to find us guilty; are keen to apportion blame.

At The Face, we like to believe our readers are far too intelligent to be nudged into the twilight world of drug abuse by a mere picture of a wasted-looking model. This is not to deny that art and life sometimes cross over: only that when they do, we trust that they can tell the difference between the myth of a glassy, glossy illusion and the reality behind it.

Beneath the swathes of rhetoric and shock-wave soundbites, the question we need to ask is simple: only its answer is tricky. How powerful are the images all around us? Do the pictures we see have implicit bearing on the people we are? On the way that we live? On whether we decide to shoot poison into our veins?

To acknowledge that the answer might be "yes" is to admit to a fear endemic to life at the end of the 20th century: that man-made things are threatening to overwhelm man. Are we ineffectual husks, blown hither and thither by the bombardment of seductive words and images blaring from our radios, stereos, monitors, TVs, cinemas, books and magazines? We create and nurture our own desire to be satiated. We cannot detach it from us. It isn't separate.

President Clinton, the fashion industry is only as culpable as the people who buy into it whole-heartedly, without discretion. And it is far easier to blame the fashion industry than to look at the cultural and sociological reasons for drug abuse. People take heroin because they hate life and quite possibly hate themselves as well. Or because they have no money and no hope. Or because they have everything but it still isn't enough. Or because they are genetically predisposed to addiction. Or because they hate it but can't stop. Or because they like it and don't want to. Not solely because they saw a model in a magazine who they thought looked "cool".

The fashion for "heroin chic" will come and go. The problem of heroin addiction won't. Doesn't this say it all?

Laura Craik is fashion features editor of The Face magazine

FEED ME!

LABOUR MACHINE PRIMED FOR NEXT COURSE

New Statesman
WHAT'S GOING ON!

CONTRIBUTORS THIS WEEK: FINTAN O'TOOLE, MARY RIDDELL, JANE ROBINS, DES WILSON, JACK STRAW, BLAKE MORRISON, JOHN LLOYD, BOYD TONKIN.

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Dr Noel Browne

Agin Church and state

Biter bit . . . Browne was savaged by a police dog on an anti-US demonstration in Dublin

IN THE turbulent waters of Irish politics, Dr Noel Browne, who has died at the age of 81, bobbed like a cork for four decades, sometimes indistinguishable from the flotsam, more frequently careering along on the crest of a wave, never totally in control of the direction or speed of his trajectory.

He was successively a member of no fewer than five political parties, including several which were implacably opposed to each other, and he also stood successfully for parliament as an Independent. A potent symbol of the political changes which swept Ireland in the 1960s, he retained a special place in the affections of ordinary voters, even as his waywardness and unpredictability caused heartburn and worse in the political organisations to which be belonged.

Born in Waterford, Noel Browne suffered from tuberculosis for a long period as a child. His education, at Beaumont, the English Jesuit public school, and his medical studies at Trinity College, was subsidised by a wealthy Dublin family. As a radical young doctor, he joined Sean MacBride's newly-formed Clann na Poblachta Party in 1948.

Although broadly republican in its aspirations, this party was to a large extent a reaction against Flanna Fail, which it saw as having become smug and complacent after 16 years in government. Browne was elected to the Dail on his first attempt in the same year, and became a cabinet minister (for health) on his first day in parliament. He made a spectacular, and largely successful, attempt to eradicate tuberculosis in his early years as minister.

He came to greater prominence, however, when his scheme for free medical care for pregnant women fell foul of the Catholic hierarchy in 1951. The hierarchy maintained that the scheme, by removing a woman's right to choose her doctor, was in opposition to Catholic social teaching. Behind the scenes, the powerful Irish Medical Association, representing doctors in private practice, supported (and may even to

Browne took on radical positions on issues such as contraception, homosexuality and divorce

some degree have instigated) the bishops' opposition. Browne — who had taken advice from a theologian — maintained that his scheme conformed to Catholic teaching and released the text of his correspondence with the hierarchy to the newspapers. In contrast, MacBride adopted the bishops' line and requested Browne's resignation. When Browne refused, he was sacked. The ensuing controversy was partly responsible for the collapse of the government shortly afterwards.

Browne was subsequently re-elected as an independent: the Irish electoral system, with proportional representation in multi-seat (frequently as many as five-member) constituencies often helped him to find a niche when the larger parties spurned him. He then joined Flanna Fail, which elected him its joint national treasurer, but found that his passionate exposition of the rights of the underprivileged sat uneasily with its increasingly centrist ideology, and refused him a further party nomination. When he stood successfully against party candidates, they expelled him.

In 1958 Browne founded the

National Progressive Democrats, effectively a small splinter party on the left, which maintained an active guerrilla role in the Dail but had no real prospects of growth. In 1963 he led the NPD into the Irish Labour Party, and became a thorn in the side of that party's leadership, not least because his views about the political role of the Catholic Church were regarded as the stuff of electoral suicide — at least up to 1969, when Labour adopted a more overtly socialist set of policies.

Within Labour, Browne's socialism took the form of increasingly radical positions on issues such as contraception, homosexuality and divorce, which caused considerable problems in a party which still had a substantial rural base. He was also vehemently opposed to coalition with the centre-right Fine Gael party, and was denied a party nomination in 1973 when he refused to endorse a pre-election commitment to join Fine Gael in government.

Between 1973 and 1977 Browne represented the constituency of Dublin University in the Irish Senate: although still a member of

His scheme to give free medical care to all pregnant women fell foul of the Irish Catholic hierarchy

Labour, he refused to take the whip. After standing successfully against an official Labour candidate in the general election of 1977, he was expelled and became a founder — and the only Dail member — of the miniscule Socialist Labour Party, a group he left in 1981 after policy differences over Northern Ireland.

As an independent after 1981, he was one of a handful of deputies who held the balance of power in the Dail which elected Dr Garrett FitzGerald's coalition government, and he voted with that government in the division which led to its downfall on the 1982 budget. He retired from active politics at the resulting general election and went to live in the Irish-speaking area of Connemara, where his continuing presence was signalled by the intermittent dispatch of waspish letters to the national newspapers.

Politically marginalised, he nevertheless retained a significant following among the more non-conformist of his countrymen. This was partly because he was most frequently seen as a rebel against the establishment — an image given additional currency by a friendly media: in a country where the majority of the population will, given a suitable opportunity, be "agin the government", these credentials stood him in good stead. But it was also because of his implacable opposition to what he saw as the power politics exercised by the Catholic Church, and his willingness to support minority causes.

A photograph of him being savaged by a police dog outside the American Embassy in Dublin at the height of the US blockade of Cuba became an icon of 1960s' protest. His autobiography, *Against The Tide* (1986), which has so far sold an astonishing 70,000 copies, is a sometimes incoherent, occasionally vitriolic, but passionate articulation of a brand of socialism which was always peculiarly his own.

He leaves a wife, Phyllis, and two daughters.

John Horgan

Noel Browne, doctor and politician, born December 20, 1916; died May 21, 1997

Virgilio Barco

A good man beaten by time

VIRGILIO Barco, who has died aged 75, attempted to create conditions for a lasting democracy in Colombia. He won the four-year state presidency in 1985 with the biggest margin of votes in the country's history, and aimed to revitalise its politics by bringing in excluded sectors and crushing the drug cartels that were penetrating the national institutions.

Constitutionally banned from seeking re-election, Barco ultimately failed and since then Colombia has been sucked into a spiralling crisis. Left-wing guerrilla groups, never integrated into the system, are gaining the ascendancy in their war against the army, under whose protection paramilitary groups violate human rights. Drug traffickers have permeated every level of society.

Barco was born in the north-eastern town of Cúcuta. His family was oil-rich and Barco took a civil engineering degree, and later an economics doctorate, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He married a naturalised Colombian from a Swedish-American background and, with her, had four children.

In 1966 he was appointed mayor of Bogota. In practical fashion he set about improving the capital's infrastructure, and became renowned for his efficiency and honesty, which boosted his later career. From 1969 to 1974 Barco was a Latin American director of the World Bank. During Jimmy Carter's 1976-1980 presidency he was his country's ambassador to the United States.

In August 1985, he won the presidential nomination for the Liberal Party, one of the two parties that have long dominated the political scene. A shy, softly spoken man, who looked more like a university professor than a politician, Barco was a poor orator, inspiring little enthusiasm even among his supporters, but he was extremely fluent in English. "The reason Barco has difficulty in speaking in public," one wit told Time magazine, "is that he's thinking in English." But for an electorate tired of populists who spoke eloquently but achieved little, even this liability proved an advantage. He won the election by a 1.5 million majority.

Applying his analytical mind, Barco ended the arrangement by which Liberals and Conservatives alternated in government, with each administration offering posts to the defeated party. The 1959 agreement had helped to end *La Violencia*, the horrific late 1940s-early 1950s period when battles between Liberals and Conservatives had cost hundreds of thousands of Colombian lives. Barco argued that the deal had outlived its usefulness, creating apathy among voters and leading to governmental stalemate. He formed an all-Liberal government, forcing the Conservatives to form a genuine opposition. At the same time, Barco also opened up new political space. He allowed direct mayoral elections although his party then suffered embarrassing defeats at the hands of the Conservatives in the country's two largest cities — Bogota and Medellin. In a ground-breaking move, he also tried to tackle the underlying causes of guerrilla activity, putting millions of dollars into building schools and hospitals in poverty-stricken regions.

Barco . . . honest reputation

In July 1989, one of Colombia's guerrilla groups, M-19, agreed to give up the armed struggle, in return for an amnesty and the right to form a political party, the Patriotic Union. It was a daring attempt which ended in disaster, since the Patriotic Union was much later forced to disband after hundreds of its members had been assassinated by paramilitary groups.

Barco's most controversial policy was implemented in December 1986 when he declared war on the drug cartels, after they had murdered the editor of one of the country's leading newspapers, an outspoken critic of the traffickers. In February 1987, he agreed to a request from the US administration for the extradition of one of the leaders of the Medellin cartel. The traffickers responded with a wave of terror, which included the August 1989 murder of Luis Carlos Galan, a popular presidential candidate who seemed likely to succeed Barco.

The president hit back by assuming emergency powers that enabled him to seize the drug barons' estates. The traffickers, calling themselves "the extraditables", vowed to kill 10 judges for every trafficker handed over to the US: hundreds of judges consequently resigned. The assault was continuing at full tilt when Barco's administration ended but his successor, César Gaviria, eventually made a deal with the traffickers, which included rescinding the extradition agreement. It was a concession that many Colombians today believe to have been mistaken.

Sue Branford

Virgilio Barco Vargas, politician, born September 17, 1921; died May 20, 1997

Birthdays

Rubens Barrichello, racing driver, 25; **Craig Brown**, satirist, 40; **Juliet Campbell**, mistress, Girton College, Cambridge, 62; **Sir Hugh Casson**, CH, architect, 89; **Rosemary Clooney**, singer and actress, 69; **Joan Collins**, actress, 63; **Nigel Davenport**, actor and trade unionist, 69; **Walter Eltis**, economist, 64; **Jean Françaix**, composer, 85; **Marius Goring**, actor, 85; **Graeme Hick**, cricketer, 31; **Anatoly Karpov**, chess player, 46; **Dr Sir John Lyons**, master, Trinity Hall, Cambridge, 65; **Humphrey Lyttelton**, bandleader and broadcaster, 76; **Lady Olga Maitland**, former Conservative MP, 52; **Martin McGuinness**, Sinn Fein MP, 47; **the Earl of Mount Charles**, pop concert promoter, 46; **John Newcombe**, tennis player, 53; **Peter Preston**, editorial director, Guardian Media Group, 59; **Robert Sangster**, racehorse owner and breeder, 61; **Artie Shaw**, jazz musician and composer, 87; **Giles Smith**, television journalist, 53.

Death Notices

HALLETT. Douglas, of 3 Salcombe Drive, Red Hill, Nottingham NG5 8JF. Died peacefully at Queens Medical Centre, Nottingham on 16th May aged 76 years. Graduate of Manchester University 1949 J.M.B examiner in History 1955 to 1992. Funeral service at Bramcote Crematorium on Thursday May 29th at 2.30pm. Cut flowers only please or donations if desired for the Stroke Association and all enquiries to A.W. Lymn, St. Albans House, 32 High Street Arnold, Nottingham. Telephone 0115 967 6777.

MILNE. On May 18 peacefully in hospital Thomas Ardley Milne MBE TD of West Kirby, Wirral aged 88 years. Funeral at All Saints Church, Thornton Hough, Wirral, Thursday May 29 at 12.15pm. Family flowers only, donations to The Children's Society c/o Quinns Funeral Service, West Kirby. Tel: 0151 625 5274.

POWNALL. Reverend Canon Tom, M.A., beloved husband of Mary, dear father of Andrew, Lydia and Stephen. Died peacefully in hospital after a short illness on May 21st 1997. Funeral service at St Luke's Church, Maidstone, on Tuesday 27th May at 3.00pm. No flowers, please, but if desired donations to C.M.J., c/o Keith Viner, 54 High Street, West Malling, Kent.

THORNTON. Crossley, died on 20th May after a long illness borne with great courage and good humour. Funeral 2pm, Wed 28th at St Marylebone Crematorium. Flowers or donations to ICRF c/o Leverton 0181 444 5753.

WARD. Barbara Mary Brougham (née Lobb), on 19th May 1997 at h me aged 66. Beloved wife of Harry and mother of Sarah and Gavin. A funeral service will be held in the King Edward Street Chapel, Macclesfield on Friday 23rd May at 10.45am. No flowers please but donations to UK-Med or the King Edward Street Chapel Restoration Fund would be appreciated. Enquiries to CWF 01625 422583.

■To place your announcement telephone 0171 713 4567 or fax 0171 713 4129 between 9am and 5pm Mon-Fri.

Jackdaw

Off Beat

TAKESHI Kitano is leaving the Kumamoto film festival. He's had a successful evening, collecting an award for his first film, *Violent Cop*, a gangster tale he both stars in and directs. But as Takeshi walks out of the ceremony, he sees half-a-dozen dark saloon cars lined up in front of him. The occupants, all bouncer-sized and wearing suits as sombre as their transport, step out and make eye contact. *Yakuza*.

Two mobsters bundle the actor-director into a car and speed off. He can hear one muttering "We've got Takeshi" into a walkie-talkie as the vehicle hurtles through the streets. After a 20-minute drive, the convoy draws up to an expensive restaurant and Takeshi is escorted inside, where he is presented to one of the local mafia heads. This is bad. Very bad.

Suddenly . . . a schoolgirl emerges from behind the mobman and jumps up and down, squealing "Takeshi, Takeshi".

"My daughter's such a big fan of yours," the Don informs the director. "She just had to meet you."

Gareth Grundy on Beat Takeshi in Neon.

Tory rats

THE Conservatives were seeking to re-invent themselves in the aftermath of the shock defeat in the 1945 general election . . . Aneurin Bevan, the Labour government's Minister of Health, addressed a rally: "That is why no amount of cajolery can eradicate from my heart a deep burning hatred for the Tory Party . . . they are lower than vermin."

With the recent opening of the Conservative Party archive at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, it has been possible to explore some of the responses of a body known as The Vermin Club. By 1949, the Vermin Club seems to have become a fully-fledged national organisation. An internal Conservative Central Office memo puts the national membership at 70,000 "without advertising" and gaining 6,000 members a month. Nests had been reportedly established through the country and "in each of the white dominions".

Bevin's pejorative phrase was adopted as an identification label by those who felt it was aimed at them. Life membership was put at two shillings. Profits were originally intended to be donated to the Conservative Party, but because these would have been subject to taxation, it was decided that all money raised would be donated to cancer research and other non-state-aided medical charities.

An early propaganda leaflet stated: "Enrol 10 more Vermin and you will become a Vile Vermin. Enrol 25 . . . and you will become a Very Vile Vermin. Enrol 200 . . . and form a nest."

Relevant research from Paul Martin, History Today.

Masai measure

TWO years ago, I became temporary chaperon of an African visitor to London, George Lekaukau. Tall, strong and stern, George was a Tswana herdsman straight from the Kalahari desert, mistaken everywhere in England for a Masai. He had never left Africa before, so . . . I looked forward to his gasps of wonder at the Underground with its magic doors, staircases and machines that first swallowed tickets and then spat them out.

Unfortunately for me, proud George had made up his mind not to be impressed by anything in Britain. He had become disillusioned by London, as it contained no cows. He measured wealth by cattle, and it was easy to see that London, judged by such standards, was one of the most poverty-stricken places on Earth. George followed me around the Tube, copying everything I did with effortless contempt, not a flicker of surprise moving his impassive features. So the Englishmen could make stairs that moved and doors that opened by themselves. It was just the sort of stupid thing he might have expected them to do.

We emerged from the Tube at St James's Park, where I thought the sight of a pelican might remind him of his native skies. George gazed at the pelican with the expression of a Red Indian at the stake. That night he was asked how he had enjoyed London. "Ah, we walked for two miles to see a *sparrow*," he replied stoically.

Roy Kerridge goes underground in Prospect.

Elvis encounter

MY FRIEND Francine is so unnervingly beautiful that ugliness of all sorts falls to pieces wherever she is. I've been watching her beauty for more than 30 years, and the truth is that it just wasn't normal to see a girl who looked like that. It was as if someone had made her up, out of a longing . . . One of Elvis's bodyguards invited [her] friend to go visit Elvis in Palm Springs. The friend was scared, so Francine went along as a chaperon.

The weekend included a tour of Elvis's closet, which, Francine said, was "like a holy place, about 15 feet long with all his white jackets — 25 or 30 of them — perfectly spaced on perfect hangars. He was so proud of it." The one time Elvis, the friend and Francine went out of the house, along with five bodyguards, was to buy Francine's friend a dress at I Magnin. They drove in three Cadillacs, "like a funeral procession". Francine was fixing her hair in the back seat of the middle Cadillac, which Elvis was driving and, she says: "I parted my hair, made a wave on the right side, and put on lip gloss — I was watching him watching me."

Back at the house, Elvis and the girls got dressed up . . . they all sat on the long sofa until one of the bodyguards got up and put on a few of Elvis's records. The friend danced with Elvis. Francine didn't really want to dance with him, but he talked her into it by saying: "You have to. One day you can tell your grandchildren that you danced with me to Blue Suede Shoes."

Alison Rose's annals of appearances, New Yorker.

Geographic . . . royal romp

Mega Alex

ON our journey, we also discovered . . . that Alexander's tale still reverberates across eastern Asia, especially strangely enough, in the Muslim world, where he remains a great folk hero . . . We saw his story retold by Greek and Turkish shadow players, and by Tadjik bards. We saw one of the last of the travelling one-man shows in Iran, complete with painted backdrop showing the death of the Persian king, Darius, in epic style. We heard about Greek medicine from the doctors of Multan in north-east Pakistan, who claim descent from Alexander's physicians; we sat in a felt yurt on the Turkmen steppe to hear the story of his devil's horns and his two-week sex romp with an Amazon queen (as today's tabloid press would put it).

Michael Wood in the footsteps of Alexander, Royal Geographical Society Magazine.

You can e-mail jackdaw@guardian.co.uk.; fax 0171-713 4366; write Jackdaw, The Guardian, 119 Farringdon Road, London EC1R 3ER.

Edited by Vanessa Harlow

هكذا من الأصل

A new broom . . . Clare Short on the day of her appointment as Secretary of State for International Development PHOTOGRAPH: GARY CALTON

Short shrift for free trade mania

LARRY ELLIOT reports on the overseas aid overhaul by 'the best since Barbara'

CLARE SHORT "will be tremendous", says Michael Foot, sitting waiting patiently for an audience with the new Secretary of State for International Development. "Absolutely tremendous: the best since Barbara [Castle]. No doubt about it."

At that, she who is the "best since Barbara" sweeps into the room, gives the 83-year-old former Labour leader a warm embrace and gets down to explaining the Government's new philosophy for aid and development.

As in almost every other department, there is a new broom at work. Britain will press for a humanitarian clause to be put into the World Trade Organisation rules to clamp down on child and forced labour, Short says. The Government will try to re-invent the idea of the state and international social democracy, to ensure that development funding is aimed at primary health and universal education. And a start will be made on reversing the steady reduction in aid as a share of GDP over the past 18 years. "There are massive changes taking place, and they are bigger than national politics."

The previous government's approach to development stood on three pillars — globalisation, a business-centred approach and monetarism. The new secretary of state, while rejecting a retreat into protectionism and dirigiste economic policies, has doubts about all three. One of her first acts was to place a moratorium on tied aid, assistance provided on the basis that British firms would win contracts as a result. "I think it leads to the tail wagging the dog. It leads neither to good commercial nor to development projects".

She added: "Globalisation can produce more wealth, but if it is not regulated it can create massive inequality. Unless we have some minimum standards, it can drive down standards across the world."

Aid agencies have been waiting for this sort of language for years. They believe that attempts to build up developing economies from the grass roots have been thwarted by the monomaniacal obsession with free trade. The new secretary of state agrees. She has no time for the corrupt and inefficient post-colonial regimes that relied on "protectionism and bloated state sectors" — but believes that the free-market model has now run its course.

"We are ready for a new era. We need a state that is efficient and uncorrupt, so that the market can work. We are looking for a third way, where there is regulation and not just the free market."

In the autumn, for the first

Labour's moral mission

time in 23 years, the Government will publish a white paper on development — a blueprint for achieving the objective adumbrated by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development of halving world poverty by 2015.

It is a tall order. According to Mr Foot, Harold Wilson considered the creation of the Overseas Development ministry to be one of the two most signficant achievements of his premiership. (The Open University was the other one). But that was in the 1960s, in the first flush of post-colonial euphoria. Today, almost half of sub-Saharan Africa is living in poverty.

"The OECD said the world should agree a plan for the eradication of poverty with definable targets. Donor countries, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the developing countries needed to work in open partnership and monitor progress year by year.

"I can go for that. Our strategy will be to influence the IMF and the World Bank to get it agreed. The European Union's approach has been muddled: we must get the EU behind it."

Even sympathetic observers believe that this may be easier said than done. "She wears her heart on her sleeve, but it will take real patience to achieve her objectives," said one.

Despite intense efforts by the former Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, only one of the 20 most indebted countries Uganda, has benefited from the plan to write off debts, with three others waiting patiently for their turn.

But Ms Short believes it can be done, and that the failures of monetarism, the interventionist approach favoured by the "tiger" economies of East Asia and positive role models provided by Uganda, Ghana and South Africa have opened the way to change. "This is a very ripe moment to get agreement. If the world moves together we can do it".

Despite the new moral thrust to Labour's policy, the Department will need the Treasury's support to build up international momentum for debt relief. Ms Short believes that Gordon Brown will be on board. He is "very anxious" to make a contribution in this field, she says.

In return, there will be no calls from her — at least not yet — for extra money. "It is too late to change spending this year. Next year I will review everything to get the focus on poverty. I will need extra money in the third year. That will be a test for us."

PowerGen ready to test Blair

Chris Barrie
Business Correspondent

THE electricity generator PowerGen is prepared to test the mettle of the Government by bidding for a regional electricity company, a move banned by the Conservatives.

Announcing a 16 per cent fall in pre-tax profits to £577 million on £2.85 billion turnover, the PowerGen chairman, Ed Wallis, said the company would look "very seriously" at buying a Rec although it was also achieving its strategy by other means.

Addressing speculation that he may bid for Southern Electric, the last independent Rec, Mr Wallis said it was unclear whether the Blair administration would block a takeover in the way that the Conservatives did when PowerGen and its larger rival, National Power, bid last year for Midlands Electricity and Southern Electric, respectively.

The Conservative industry secretary, Ian Lang, had decided that the generators' deals, creating vertically integrated groups, would damage competition. PowerGen subsequently planned to test Labour's resolve by bidding for Yorkshire Electricity in the aftermath of the election, but was pipped to the deal by the US groups American Electric Power and Public Service Company of Colorado.

Mr Wallis said that PowerGen would want a Rec for its contribution to the group's finances. The company has already offset its rebuff at the hands of the Conservatives by signing heads of agreement with "a few" regional electricity companies as a prelude to finalising contracts for the sale of electricity.

The deals would give PowerGen access to the household market prior to the advent of full competition in electricity supply next year.

Mr Wallis refused to comment on Labour's windfall tax. The company has submitted its views to the Treasury.

The group is striving to reduce its dependence on UK business. It announced a 40 per cent stake in a coal-fired power station at Serang in Indonesia and a 30 per cent stake in plant at Map Ta Phut in Thailand. With other international projects lined up, the deals should contribute £100 million in operating profits by 2003.

Stripping out exceptionals, PowerGen's profits rose 2 per cent to £575 million. The group took an exceptional profit of £69 million on the sale of its stake in Midlands, offset by a £67 million provision against the costs of gas take-or-pay contracts.

Operating profit in the core electricity and gas business was £564 million, with other activities contributing £40 million.

News in brief

Spirit of adventure

GLENMORANGIE, the Scotch whisky producer, is hoping the planned merger between Grand Metropolitan and Guinness will result in a number of spirits brands coming on the market. Chairman Geoffrey Maddrell said yesterday: "They are bound to offload certain smaller brands which we'd be interested in if they fitted our portfolio."

Mr Maddrell refused to be drawn on which brands would be of interest, but a company insider said: "We'd love to get our hands on Pimm's (owned by Guinness). It would sit perfectly alongside our malts." The £23 billion merger, which would create the world's largest spirits group, is expected to face scrutiny from both US and European competition authorities. — *Dominic Walsh*

Insurance suspect arrested

A MAN has been arrested and released on bail in connection with the Eastern Star Motor Policies fraud. The Department of Trade and Industry yesterday declared Eastern Star to be a fraudulent insurer and said any motorist insured by the "company" should seek alternative cover. The police said a man arrested by the CID at Leyton, Essex, was being investigated in connection with the suspected selling of bogus insurance policies. He is due to return to Leyton pending the outcome of a report to the Crown Prosecution Service. No charges have yet been brought against him. — *Extel*

One 2 One forecasts profits

ONE 2 ONE, the smallest of Britain's four mobile phone operators, is set to move into profit by the end of the decade, its managing director, Jan Peters, said yesterday. The company would break even at the operating level next year, move into operating profits the following year, and turn in pre-tax profits a little later, she forecast.

One 2 One lost about £280 million last year. It is expected to rack up another heavy loss this year as its capital investment programme peaks. The company, jointly owned by two telecom groups, Cable & Wireless and US West, has so far invested £970 million in its all-digital network, which covers about 80 per cent of the UK population.

Ms Peters said One 2 One has 8.8 per cent of the UK market. The company, whose customer base has risen by 51 per cent to 620,000 over the past year, hopes that its more flexible price plans will accelerate growth. — *Nicholas Bannister*

Virgin misses the boat

Tony May

RICHARD Branson's Virgin group has been approached to run the QE2, Cunard's much-loved but ageing flagship, but has rejected the offer.

The QE2, along with the other four ships in the depleted Cunard fleet, is understood to have no long-term future under Kvaerner. The debt-burdened Anglo-Norwegian construction and shipbuilding group acquired Cunard's parent, Trafalgar House, last year for £903 million.

Shares of Kvaerner rose 3 per cent on the Oslo stock exchange yesterday on a report in the Lloyd's List trade newspaper that the group was poised to sell the loss-making Cunard division for £250 million. The buyer was said to be the Monaco-based Vlasov which already has four cruise ships in its Silversea fleet. Virgin was said to be interested in a parallel deal to operate the QE2.

The group is understood to be excited by the opportunities available were ships to be added to its portfolio of planes and trains. It has been approached a number of times with offers to involve it in the cruise business but has yet to find the right deal.

An industry rival doubted that the QE2 was capable of making much money saying it had at most five more operational years ahead of it and was relatively expensive to run. Kvaerner declined to comment.

Cunard claims to have 37 per cent of the luxury market but lost £134 million last year. Its aim is to return to profit by the end of 1998 by moving firmly into the luxury end of the market.

EU gives Boeing bumpy ride

Julie Wolf in Brussels

BOEING will have to abandon exclusive sales deals with airlines and offer other concessions if the European Commission is to clear its merger with McDonnell Douglas, senior EU sources said yesterday.

Brussels is prepared to declare the deal illegal if the two parties do not meet the commission's concerns about competition in the international aerospace sector. Such a move would raise legal uncertainties over any contracts entered into by European airlines to purchase planes from the merged company.

The commission would not hesitate to impose fines of up to 10 per cent of turnover if the companies ignore the commission and go ahead, the sources added. The tough stance was reflected in the commission's objections which were sent to the two companies on Wednesday night.

The commission still hopes to reach a negotiated settlement that would allow it to clear the merger but it now appears it is up to the companies to propose ways of alleviating the commission's concerns. The commission is due to hold hearings on the case next month and issue a decision on the merger by the end of July.

While the EU appears prepared for a struggle with Boeing and McDonnell Douglas, the sources spoke of positive signs from British Airways and American Airlines, who now appear to accept that the commission has a role in vetting their alliance. Talks are to be held in the coming weeks.

NOTICE OF VARIATION OF INTEREST RATES

With effect from 2 June 1997 Mortgage Rate will increase to 7.60% per annum for both existing and new borrowers.

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Underside

Julia Finch

THE Grocer trade magazine appears to be struggling to live up to its pre-election scoop that Ken Clarke was considering putting up VAT on domestic fuel.

Take this from the latest issue: "Sainsbury's marketing director Kevin McCarten told The Grocer *exclusively* that his company was no longer a supermarket but a food retailer." Did he think we hadn't noticed?

A WARNING for Guinness workers wondering what lies ahead if the merger with GrandMet goes ahead: the poor souls who man the lobby of GrandMet's plush West End HQ sport neckties dotted with motifs depicting the activities of their employer — including little hamburgers to represent Burger King and tiny vodka bottles for Smirnoff; they are also subjected to a mammoth video screen, playing the Burger King ad in 42 different languages.

Prospects of employment elsewhere probably don't seem so bad after all.

HOWARD Davies, deputy governor of the Bank of England, told US bankers earlier this year: "Underlying this . . . is the contention that the traditional separation between banking, securities and insurance is breaking down and so the difference between institutions and functions is less meaningful. I am not persuaded of this — though the activities of banks and securities firms do overlap at the margin, this is not true of the core activities."

This is the same Mr Davies who has just been appointed the first head of the City's new super-regulator which will have responsibility for . . . banks, securities firms and quite likely the insurance industry, too. The speech is included in the Bank's latest quarterly bulletin.

NEWS from TV land. The BBC's early morning Business Breakfast slot has been spared the axe.

The future of the hour-long programme — fronted by Paul Burden and Sara Coburn — has been in the balance for a year, since an internal report questioned the value of devoting so much TV time to business coverage. But sense has prevailed and the advice of weekly current affairs editor Tim Suter ignored. Helen Boaden, former Head of Production in Manchester, has moved in as the BBC's new business supremo and the show goes on.

THE Singapore National Institute of Education is hosting an international conference next month on thinking.

The Learn to Think course, according to NIE director Leo Tan, is part of a £1 billion, five-year government plan to make thinking "a priority" in Singapore and overcome "cultural inhibitions" that evidently discourage independent thinking and the questioning of authority among Singaporeans.

HOT Jazz, the music'n'curry venue sponsored by Jazz FM at the Shezan restaurant in London's Knightsbridge, was sizzling last weekend. The kitchen burned down. Jazz and jalfrezi fans are no doubt gutted too.

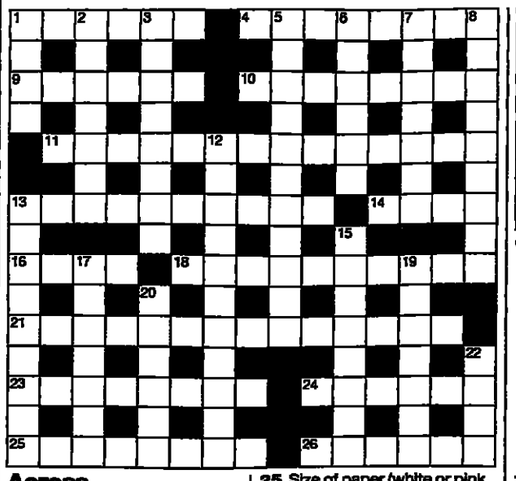
WHAT does a well-prepared bridegroom do when he's paid the priest, the choirboys and the bellringers? The answer — if the nuptials are in central Paris — is pay the police as well.

Simon Briscoe, newly-appointed managing director of analysis at Nikko Bank's London office was warned his wedding in the Latin Quarter on Saturday could be ruined by gatecrashing tramps intent on exacting revenge on the bourgeoisie.

The only solution, he was advised, was to proffer a generous donation to the gendarmerie benevolent fund, ensuring les boys in bleu would mount guard. Briscoe paid up.

Guardian Crossword No 20,971

Set by Quantum

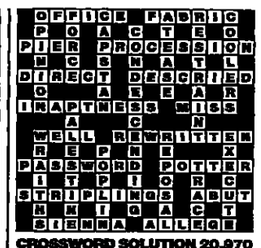


Across

1 Shopping area, in a way? (6)
4 Constable to English is notable (8)
9 Get rid of one participating in blunder (6)
10 Taking part is attractive (8)
11 Took a dislike to the essence being deceived by false clues? (3,3,3,5)
13 A valuable keeper (10)
14 Plastic container of wine? (4)
16 Move very slowly in church (4)
18 Unusual post priest finds most difficult to deal with (10)
21 Famous last words? (8,6)
23 I bat over out. It's unproductive (8)
24 Overcharge for the coat (6)
25 Size of paper (white or pink, perhaps) (8)
26 Inventor's match-end goes west (6)

Down

1 Moab's recollected here? (4)
2 Humble nut, say (7)
3 Have no regard for what's offered in sale (8)
5 Although off-key, sonny and chorus keeping time together (11)
6 Slip away to get drinks in middle of week (6)
7 Here in France the lake gives impression of distance (7)
8 To which the overweight should switch? (5,4)
12 The better side of cricket? (5,6)
13 One leaves fiesta with flag waving in strong wind (5,4)
15 Asked for and attracted interest (8)
17 Design or decor to deteriorate? (7)
19 Abandons city area that embraces second cuts (7)
20 Jerk to taunt companion (6)
22 Thin list (4)



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NEWSPAPERS SUPPORT RECYCLING
Recycled paper made up 41.2% of the raw material for UK newspapers in the first six months of 1996
ABFPRT

Clare Short's third way, page 15

Power player's bid ploy, page 15

Financial Editor: Alex Brummer
Telephone: 0171-239-9610
Fax: 0171-833-4456

Finance Guardian

CBI pitches into rate row

Larry Elliott
Economics Editor

THE CBI was set on a collision course with the Bank of England last night after saying that the mounting difficulties of the UK's exporting companies left it opposed to further rises in interest rates.

With export demand at its weakest for two-and-a-half years, the CBI urged that taxes should be raised in the summer Budget as an alternative means of cooling down the economy. Although it expects the cost of borrowing to be hoisted from 6.25 per cent to 7 per cent by early next year, the CBI said the Bank should refrain from action unless the pound fell on the foreign exchanges.

"We predict robust economic growth and low inflation over the next two years, but there is still concern over the balance of the economy," said the CBI's chief economist, Kate Barker.

"In late 1997, consumer spending is forecast to gather pace while export growth falls. Cautious fiscal policy is therefore assumed, to minimise upward pressure on interest rates. Higher interest rates which prolonged sterling's strength would increase the severe difficulties faced by many exporters."

But the Bank — armed with new data yesterday showing that the domestic economy is buoyant — believes that interest rates need to go up in the coming months whatever happens to the exchange rate.

Figures from the Office for National Statistics revealed that the volume of spending in shops and stores rose by 1.2 per cent in the three months to April, 4.5 per cent higher than the same quarter last year. Clothing and footwear sales are up 6.7 per cent on a year ago, while household goods sales rose 9.1 per cent.

A separate ONS breakdown of growth in the first quarter of 1997 showed that consumer expenditure — including items such as car purchases and restaurant meals as well as retail sales — increased 1 per cent on the final three months of 1996 and was 3.5 per cent higher than in January to March 1996.

Investment also showed signs of emerging from its post-recession doldrums, rising by 3.3 per cent on the quarter, according to the ONS figures. Growth overall rose 0.9 per cent on the quarter and 3 per cent over the year.

The CBI believes that the momentum will be kept up throughout 1997 and 1998 provided that the pound depreciates by 10 per cent against a basket of world currencies by the end of next year.

Sterling slipped by almost three pfennigs in the City yesterday as rumours that the Goverment might oust Eddie George as Bank governor combined with a disappointing auction of gilts to unsettle currency dealers. Stronger than expected economic news from Germany also helped to boost the mark.

But the pound is still 20 per cent higher than it was at the start of 1996 and the CBI's latest industrial trends survey found two-fifths of manufacturers reporting overseas order books below normal.

The CBI said that if the pound were to remain at its present level, growth would be cut from 2.7 per cent to 2.1 per cent next year and that the Government would hit its 2.5 per cent inflation target.

Forecasts for the next 18 months were made more difficult by uncertainties over how much of the windfall gains from building society conversions would be spent rather than saved. The CBI's prediction of 4.4 per cent consumer spending growth this year and 3.5 per cent next is based on only 15 per cent of the £28 billion being spent.

Storehouse promises 1,000 jobs

Roger Cowe

STOREHOUSE yesterday became the latest retailer to announce expansion plans when it promised 1,000 new jobs in its Bhs stores. The plans form part of a £120 million development programme to improve the performance of both Bhs and the Mothercare chain.

Keith Edelman, Storehouse's chief executive, said the Bhs chain needed substantial investment to update existing stores and expand it into a national network.

"There has been a long history of under-investment and costly experimentation," he said. "With some of our stores it is like shopping in the 1970s, not the 1990s."

A new Bhs store will open in Bury, Lancashire, later this year, while early next year the chain will spread to St Helens, Falkirk, Edinburgh, Burton, Bath and the Cribbs Causeway development outside Bristol.

Mr Edelman was speaking after announcing a dip in profits last year due to the cost of integrating the Childrens World acquisition.

Before that £16 million cost, group profits rose by 17 per cent to £119 million. Profits at Bhs rose by 14 per cent to a record for the chain of £88 million, while Mothercare contributed £27 million, a rise of 11 per cent. An additional £4 million came from Childrens World, which was bought from Boots last spring.

The figures disguised disappointing sales performances at both chains, however, with turnover shored up by new stores and growth in franchising. In comparable stores, Bhs sales grew by only 3 per cent, while Mothercare saw sales drop by 3 per cent.

Mr Edelman said both chains had suffered in a tough market for children's clothes. He said all the growth in the market had come from sports brands such as Adidas and Nike and replica football kits. Excluding these sales, mostly through specialist outlets, the market had fallen by 1 per cent.

Mothercare had also suffered because it failed to update classic designs, and equipment sales had been hit because of poor product development by a supplier.

Mr Edelman said the group was committed to Mothercare, which had a good market position and would be strengthened by the merger with the out-of-town Childrens World stores.

"We are committed to building two robust businesses that can compete with the best," he said.

Storehouse's chairman, Alan Smith, said: "We now have both the resources and a clear sense of direction."

The top ten creators

Jobs announced since the beginning of April

Storehouse	1,000
Marks & Spencer	1,700
Greenalls	2,000
Burton	3,400
Safeway	6,000
Whitbread	7,000
B & Q	500
House of Fraser	1,000
Dixons	750
Tesco	6,000

Ralph Lauren and his wife Ricky are poised to pick up a bonanza PHOTOGRAPH: JEFF CHRISTENSEN

Lauren fashions a £244m windfall

Mark Tran in New York

FASHION designer Ralph Lauren and his family stand to make a $397 million (£244 million) windfall when the Polo Ralph Lauren company goes public later this year.

Mr Lauren, a former tie designer from the run-down Bronx whose polo logos now adorn tennis shirts around the world, is expected to benefit mightily from what should be the world's biggest flotation of a fashion company at $700 million.

Papers filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission, ahead of the planned flotation of a 30 per cent stake, show his firm could be worth nearly $2.5 billion in total. The estimate is based on a price of $23½ a share.

The company plans to sell 29.5 million Class A shares priced at between $22 and $25 per share. Six million of the shares would be offered abroad and the rest in the US.

The offering would provide the first opportunity for the public to get its hands on a fashion money machine. In the year ended March 30, 1996, the company earned $109.7 million on sales of $1 billion, an increase of 17.5 per cent on the 1995 figures. Of the total sales, $110 million came from licensing income from items like Lauren's home products.

Goldman Sachs, the lead underwriter, expects to make a bonanza from the offering. The bank invested $135 million in August 1994 for a 28 per cent stake in the company. That investment has grown more than five-fold in less than three years to $689 million.

While fashion companies have been a mixed bag in recent public offerings, Lauren is expected to shine. Nautica Enterprises and Tommy Hilfiger have dipped recently but still trade well above their offer prices. Donna Karan, Mossimo and Designer Holdings have not fared so well; all are selling below their offer prices.

The previous biggest fashion offering came from Gucci, which raised $539 million, followed by Tommy Hilfiger's $447 million, Donna Karan's $258 million and Guess? $126 million.

Mr Lauren sold his first Polo tie, a wide, wildly designed object, in 1967. A year later, he launched his first menswear collection. Men's clothes remain the core of the business, accounting for 51.8 per cent of worldwide sales.

Mr Lauren and his family will continue to control 89.8 per cent of the company through their 100 per cent control of B shares.

Nationwide clash worries society bosses

Teresa Hunter

THE Nationwide, soon to be Britain's biggest building society, yesterday stood accused of threatening the demise of the mutual movement with its high-risk strategy of confronting rebels bent on converting it to a bank.

The accusations, from the leaders of other mutuals, came as it emerged that the building society watchdog may intervene to block attempts to force a flotation of the Nationwide.

Five dissident society members, led by former butler Michael Hardern, are seeking election to the Nationwide board in a bid to force the society to become a bank and distribute free shares to members worth around £1,000.

The Nationwide is meeting the challenge head-on, by acknowledging that their election success would compel the society to rethink its long-term commitment to remaining a building society.

But many society bosses are outraged at the Nationwide's approach to the challenge from Mr Hardern and his gang of four. Behind the scenes at yesterday's Building Society Conference at Brighton fears were expressed that the Nationwide was engaging in a high-risk strategy that could backfire — and lead not just to the Nationwide abandoning mutuality, but to the demise of the remaining 71 societies which might all subsequently be forced to convert.

The Nationwide maintains that as a democratic organisation any serious challenge to its control would have to be openly debated with members and put to the vote.

But one senior building society executive said: "You can not have a rational and open debate with a man who has vowed to ensure the destruction of the entire building society industry. If we are not careful that is exactly what he could achieve."

Another society boss said: "The Nationwide is playing a dangerous game which could have repercussions for us all. The scenario being played at the Nationwide could snowball and involve us all."

Sources pointed out, however, that the chief commissioner could step in by using his powers to expel from a building society board any director not found to be fit and proper.

The commission has already warned Mr Hardern about the way he advised people to cash in on as many windfalls as possible by opening dozens of accounts. It is also known to be concerned about the financial arrangements of his organisation promoting conversions.

Educating our mutual friends

SARAH RYLE reports on the founding of Britain's first personal finance academy

FEARS that finance know-how in this country is so poor that even some building societies cannot count on their own staff to define the principle of mutuality have prompted the establishment of Britain's first academy of personal finance.

The new director of the centre, launched yesterday, said that the whole sector had taken on the characteristics of a minefield — including the notice that warns "Keep Out".

Chris Green, who will head the Consumer Finance Education Centre — already nicknamed Money Matters — at Umist in Manchester, talked about the centre's mission in evangelical tones.

"The building societies are churning out information about the benefits of mutuality, yet there are very well-educated people, and probably even half their staff, who do not have a clue what that means," he said.

The centre is partly funded by the Government through a £125,000 Economic and Social Research Council grant and will draw £210,000 from 13 big companies in the financial services sector.

But Mr Green, an academic at Umist and former businessman, stressed that the centre will be independent and will provide teaching materials that are not just ill-disguised adverts for companies.

He explained: "We will concentrate more on principles than on products. We will keep bureaucracy to a minimum and will bring together temporary teams to work on each project.

"There will be teams of teachers deciding what materials they need. They know what will link in to the national curriculum.

"They get a lot of material that they do not ask for and that they cannot use and it goes straight into the bin."

The centre will not do any direct teaching and is modelled on a centre established by the chemical industry at York University in 1988.

Bob Boucher, principal and vice-chancellor of Umist, said the public had been scared off by scandals in the financial services sector and by criticism of regulators.

Brighton Notebook

We should have mutual respect

Alex Brummer

AMID the fast-paced change being inaugurated by Gordon Brown at the Treasury, it is easy to forget that there is a financial revolution already under way. The volume of funds which will change hands in the next few months as a result of the process of conversion from building societies/life mutuals to public companies will almost certainly dwarf any tax-raising measures — including the windfall levy — contained in Labour's June Budget.

Yet the impact of pumping at least £25 billion of footloose cash and equity into the financial system is little understood. It has the potential not just to change the monetary balance of the economy — something which the newly independent Bank of England will have to deal with — but to overturn the current settlement in the financial services sector as well as gum up the stock market settlement system, Crest.

By effectively encouraging the conversion of mutuals to publicly-quoted companies, to somehow fulfil the self-image of a more competitive financial marketplace, the ousted Tory administration unleashed a phenomenon which it may be hard to halt. Even though the leading remaining building societies like the Nationwide (with £40 billion of assets) and the Bradford & Bingley (with £17 billion) have become convincing backers of the mutual model, there is no guarantee they can forever resist the pressure from members and agitators, like Michael Hardern, to explore the process of conversion. If that happens then the mutual/building societies movement, as serious players in the UK financial system, would look doomed.

The Building Societies Association, as the representative body of the remaining mutuals, has not yet fully recovered from the shock of seeing its biggest members — led by the Halifax — cut loose. Several of the medium weight societies, with assets below the £10 billion mark, believe that a unique opportunity has been missed at the BSA's conference in Brighton to lay out the raison d'etre of the movement at a time of both radical political and financial change. The concern is that the rump of what is left will be consigned to the political and financial fringe, as it has in the new City regulatory structures, allowing it to wither along with other anachronistic groups like the friendly societies.

What the BSA, apparently, has failed to grasp, at least in its public stance, is that the remaining mutual societies are in an enormously advantageous position. Whereas consumers are generally hostile to banks, they remain favourably disposed to building societies which are less forbidding and often more efficient. In that they do not have to satisfy shareholders, the mutuals can think long-term in terms of interest rate returns for members, new products, mortgages and hopefully — in times of adverse conditions in the housing market — they will not be as quick to foreclose as their more mercenary brethren. They also have the opportunity to become direct players in social housing through partnerships with housing associations and local government.

The ability of the remaining societies to pick-up business, as a result of conversions, is illustrated by the Alliance & Leicester transfer to the equity market. In stock market terms, the combination of an already strong FTSE together with the demand by institutions for higher financial sector weightings, has sent the shares soaring to an unexpected premium with the share trading at above 600p (against an original price of 534p).

But the secondary effects are also fascinating. A high proportion of customers receiving or cashing in their shares see this as an opportunity to move their retail balances. This is not simply a question of speculation or carpetbagging — although that may play a part. Customers instinctively prefer to stick with mutuals. A medium-weight society, like the Portman, knows from the cheques it receives that 10 per cent of the accounts it has opened up in recent weeks are refugees from the Alliance & Leicester. There is also some evidence, from the Nationwide among others, that the mutuals are starting to steal mortgage market share from their converting rivals.

IF the Alliance & Leicester conversion has had such an impact on the retail savings market, then the consequences of the Halifax transfer next month could be uncontrollable. The Halifax has tried to restrict the amount of shares immediately being converted to cash surreptiously, by using acceptance forms which lead the member to believe it is in their best interests to leave the shares in the Halifax's safekeeping. But the leakage is likely to be substantial: this is not just, perhaps, one-third of the newly quoted shares being sold, but the millions of members who will choose to close their retail Halifax accounts on conversion and move it to other mutuals.

Moreover, the institutional demand for the shares of converted societies will almost certainly mean that companies from the Norwich Union to the Halifax will trade at a premium. But in that premium are the dangers of hubris: there will be the temptation to buy other financial services assets at above the market price (as was certainly the case with the Scottish Amicable). That will be fine while the financial sector remains so buoyant, but the price will be paid in the next economic downswing.

Beckett tough on rail takeover

Keith Harper
Transport Editor

THE Trade and Industry Secretary, Margaret Beckett, took her first important political decision yesterday by referring the takeover of two rail companies by National Express to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

In a tough move, which reflects a more interventionist approach, Mrs Beckett ignored the advice of the Office of Fair Trading and insisted the takeover of the ScotRail and Central routes should be referred to the MMC.

She said the takeovers raised competition concerns in the market for the supply of public transport passenger services in Scotland and the West Midlands. She said John Bridgeman, the director general of fair trading, had advised her not to refer the Central acquisition, but she had decided there were competitive concerns which warranted "a thorough investigation".

Mr Bridgeman advised her that the ScotRail acquisition should only be referred if National Express did not divest itself of Scottish Citylink Coaches.

National Express has quickly become the largest train operator, with five franchises, including Gatwick Express and Mrs Beckett is concerned that the company will be able to take advantage of its dominant position as a national coach operator in the railway industry.

TOURIST RATES — BANK SELLS

Australia 2.042	France 9.12	Italy 2,689	Singapore 2.305
Austria 19.095	Germany 2.715	Malta 0.605	South Africa 7.15
Belgium 56.00	Greece 434.00	Netherlands 3.04	Spain 227.00
Canada 2.202	Hong Kong 12.38	New Zealand 2.302	Sweden 12.18
Cyprus 0.606	India 58.99	Norway 11.25	Switzerland 2.267
Denmark 10.405	Ireland 1.06	Portugal 272.50	Turkey 222,440
Finland 8.28	Israel 5.59	Saudi Arabia 6.07	USA 1.61

Supplied by NatWest Bank (excluding Indian rupee and Israeli shekel).

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